

Dear London Ballet Circle members

I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for the sponsorship of my apprenticeship with Ballet Cymru for the Autumn tour.

I have had such an incredible apprenticeship and now I am over the moon that I will be returning to the company next season on full contract. I feel so incredibly fortunate to have received your support and I must admit the support that I have had over the years from you all has meant so much to me. I feel as though the The London Ballet Circle is the shining light behind me and my achievements as a dancer and I truly hope to make you all proud of whom you have supported by continuing to work as hard as I can.

I have kept a diary of my apprenticeship for you all to browse through! I hope you enjoy looking at it as much as I enjoyed creating it,

I hope to see you again soon!

All best wishes

Ann Wall

Record of Ballet Cymru Apprenticeship Autumn 2016 By Ann Wall

Week 1

On Saturday 16th September I travelled to Newport to move into my accommodation. I am staying at Student Village a student accommodation block. The staff were very welcoming and a lovely spacious room awaited me. Soon I had unpacked and decorated my room and it already felt very homely.



In my new room after putting the pictures on my wall!

On Monday 19th I had my first day. I was quite anxious because I had been having pain in my right achilles tendon for 3 weeks prior to starting and I can't say that I felt very prepared. I hadn't jumped for 3 weeks and had only been getting back into pirouettes a couple of days before I started. Everyone was again very welcoming towards me and thankfully my foot was feeling better.

Through the course of this first week I was to learn a lot of choreography and to be honest, I can't say that I had many hours of sleep during this week, as I was up with the dvd trying to learn choreography! By Thursday we were running both Romeo and Juliet in which I am dancing Lady Capulet and Little Red Riding Hood and the Three Little Pigs in which I am dancing a minpin (a creature of the forest). Thankfully all the other dancers helped me out a lot because the following Tuesday we were already off on tour.

Week 2

The journey to Carlisle was a long one taking us six hours. It didn't help that 45 minutes in the bus broke down and we had to wait an hour while the AA arrived! Thankfully we drove into a service station just in time, a rather strange one which seemed to have been left over from another era. Everything seemed outdated somehow and the dancers all agreed that it was like something out of the Stepford Wives!

The next day we drove to Hexham for our first performance of Red Riding Hood, a pretty little place with a nice, if a little cramped stage. I was very nervous before this performance as I still didn't feel overly secure with all the choreography, however it didn't go too badly.



The theatre in Hexham

The next day we went to Falkirk for our opening night of Romeo and Juliet. This was an extremely cold theatre with a raked stage. Nevertheless the show went well and I was pleased because Darius (the company's director) seemed happy with how I danced the role of Lady Capulet.

The following day we were fortunate enough to have the day off and being only a 20 minute bus ride from Glasgow most of the dancers decided to do some sightseeing there. By the end of the day I had walked all round the city, been to the Museum of Modern Art, The Light House, on the top of which you can see the whole of Glasgow, the war memorial and much more.



The Museum of Modern Art

The following day we went to Ayr, a lovely town on the Estuary with beautiful architecture. I enjoyed a lovely walk around the town and managed to find some souvenirs for my family. Unfortunately, Dan injured his knee and was unable to dance in the performance, so Robbie had to leap to and learn his role as one of the pigs. After making a few changes, the show was ready. We almost didn't have Dylan for this show either, as he just missed being knocked down by a car! A man with a prosthetic was parking his car and accidentally put his foot on the accelerator!



A view in Ayr

The following day we were in Alnwick, another beautiful town. Although we had little time for sight seeing, I still managed to catch a glimpse and a few pictures of Alnwick Castle where Harry Potter was filmed.



Alnwick Castle

The following day we returned to Newport for some much needed rest, washing and home cooking!

Week 3

On our day off on Tuesday I went to the gym and did some shopping before meeting up with the other dancers to go and see the Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre at the WMC Cardiff. The performance was incredible and I felt truly inspired by it.

The next day we were in the studio rehearsing Romeo and Juliet with some proper cleaning and The London Ballet Circle came to visit us which was lovely. It was so nice to see Susan and let her know how much I am enjoying it here.



The company with members of The London Ballet Circle

The following day we had a company split, with half of us going to Neath Port Talbot College where we worked with some of the students on a piece choreographed by Craig Croombes which we will be performing at Swansea Grand before our performance of Romeo and Juliet. It was a very challenging and stimulating day and I am performing a pas de deux section with one of the students from the college.

The next day we went off on tour again to Brecon. Here we had a great class prior to our performance of Romeo and Juliet, with a lady who used to dance with Munich State Opera Ballet. The class was truly inspiring and her students were of a very high standard. Over the last few weeks we have also been involved in many workshops which have been really interesting as I feel I am learning a lot about the

teaching side of things as well.

The performance went well and the stage was really big. It was also the first show that we had the hanging chain curtains for which added to the atmosphere on stage. After the show we had to drive back to Newport to drop some sets off then another 2 and a half hours to Reading for the night. We arrived at the Hotel in Reading at 2 am! The next morning we set off at 9 am for another 2 hour drive to Chelmsford, ready for a double show day! Great audiences, especially for the evening show. By the end of that day we all crashed out! It is such a rewarding experience though, as I feel that I am really helping to bring ballet across the country to many places which may not otherwise have much access to it.

The following day we had a 4 hour bus ride back to Newport. The bus rides have benefits though because I am getting to know the other dancers and learning about their careers.

Week 4

I started this week by going into the studio on our day off. I did a good class and rehearsed some of my solos. It was nice to have so much space to practice and I did a lot of work on my grand jetés.

On Tuesday we were back in Neath Port Talbot rehearsing Craig Coombs' piece. It was great to see it all coming together. The pas de deux felt better, although I still feel that it is somewhat inconsistent. It feels different every time I do it and I find it challenging trying to figure out the co ordination with my partner Rob, as his training and physicality is so different. It was a long day and we didn't arrive back to Newport until 8.15 pm. Starving by this point, I opted for a take away Nandos which was very tasty indeed!

Wednesday we went to Treorchy, a lovely theatre with, unfortunately a very small audience. We started with a Curtain Raiser and so the students involved then went to watch the show. Most of them left in the interval though so the audience was even smaller! Back to Newport that night for a nice sleep in my own bed.

The following day we travelled to St Ives. A beautiful little town on the river.



With Mark in St Ives

The stage was somewhat challenging as it was very small with no wing space, half the stage was concrete and the other half like trestle tables, there were also ridges which proved difficult to negotiate around. Nevertheless we had a good audience. It felt very rewarding to perform here because I doubt the venue gets very much ballet to be honest. During the show Andrea actually got punched on the nose during a fight scene and it was bleeding. The energy on stage was very real! A 3 hour journey after the show! Didn't get into the hotel until 1.30 am.

The following day was great as we were in Swansea Grand. A beautiful theatre, by far the best stage so far, with a really enthusiastic audience. We also had the curtain raiser that Craig had choreographed. The duet didn't go so well for me. Parts of it were more connected than they had been in rehearsals, but other parts were quite shaky. I was really pleased because after the show there was an opportunity to talk to Craig and he completely agreed with how I felt it went which was good. He also said that my role as Lady Capulet was his favourite character. It was interesting for me because I felt really very nervous for this show. I think this was because it was our first larger scale performance. We journeyed back to Newport after the show.

Sunday was a day to sort out my work for my BA (the top up for my degree after the diploma I received from ENBS) and catch up on washing etc.

On Monday Anna and I went to the studio to do some work. It was really beneficial to take things apart a bit and work on technique.

Tuesday we left for Stroud to do Red Riding Hood. A sweet little place with some lovely second hand antique shops. The theatre was a Play House on the top of a hill so we had a nice hike to get back from the shops which warmed us up really well for class!

The audience was so enthusiastic and they seemed to love it from start to finish. The owners of the venue were also lovely and they brought us all pizza after the show, even getting me a gluten free one! Late night again not getting in until gone half past twelve.

Next morning we left for Grantham to do Romeo and Juliet. I found this the hardest stage so far to dance on. I think it was because the way the bed was placed was literally in the middle of the stage so I couldn't fit a lot of the choreography in. I felt very restricted and I wasn't happy with how the performance went to be honest, but I learned a lot about how to adapt to this sort of a stage.

On Thursday we went to Stamford. This is a stunning place which I thoroughly enjoyed exploring. The whole town was filled with historic churches and buildings, it really was a beautiful place and I managed to get some lovely pictures.





Robbie found this mannequin head in one of the dressing rooms and had us all in hysterics!

The performance went really well actually and I felt like I really enjoyed it. After the show all the dancers went for a drink and had some really good discussions. I am really loving being around the other dancers and getting on so well with everyone. It is great to be around people who are experienced and who you can gather knowledge from.

Friday was a travel day to Bangor. When we eventually got to there the company was split between two hotels because there was not enough space in one. Dylan, Mark, Miguel, Anna and I were at the Travelodge whilst Robbie, Lydia, Andrea and Gwen went to the Premier Inn. We had a great night cooking our dinner in the microwave and watching movies in Dylan's room! I had such a lovely massive room all to myself so I got some pictures of it!



My room in the Travelodge!

Saturday was great! A very special day. During the class Darius announced that I was doing so well and that he was really pleased with how I have fitted into the company. He said that I work so hard and well and he is very impressed. It was such a boost to my confidence! The performance went well and I feel like for the first time I managed to figure out a way of portraying Lady Capulet's reaction to Tybalt's death which is more mature. The difficulty I have come up with whilst dancing this role is being sincere and yet simultaneously looking strong and mature. I discovered that posture has a huge impact on this as if I am upset, naturally I drop my back. However, in doing this I can appear a bit weak and my youth shows quite clearly. Therefore, to give the impression of being an older woman, I am concentrating on maintaining my posture more whilst still responding in a natural fashion.

After this show some of the dancers were talking to some of the audience members and apparently saying that I was terrifying in the role of Lady Capulet which I was pleased about!

This was also the day that I did a French roll for Lydia before class which turned out well!



The French roll I did for Lydia!



The theatre in Bangor

On Sunday I set off to North Wales to visit my family. Had a lovely weekend and a great ballet class and pas de deux with my brother at home! Just about had enough time to make my dad's sandwiches for work, some flapjacks for my mum, fitness and class with my brother and sister, work on my blog for my degree, go for a walk, stroke my cats and enjoy some home cooking before returning to Newport!

Weeks 5 and 6

A week of half days was quite nice following such a hectic time. We did class and rehearsal until 2pm each day because another company was using our studio in the afternoon, so I went to the gym and worked on strength and stamina building most of the afternoons. On the Tuesday I was slotted into the opening for Red Riding Hood ready for the performance the next day.

On the Wednesday we toured Red Riding hood to Teignmouth. A lovely sea side resort which seemed like an ideal setting for the show. The theatre was on the sea front and there was something almost traditional about the whole event, with holidaymakers bringing their families to the 6pm show. The floor was very hard so Darius advised us to take care when we were jumping! Thankfully we all got through it in one piece!



The sea front at Teignmouth

For the rest of that week and the following week that followed, we worked on Romeo and Juliet in preparation for the important Newport shows on the Friday and Saturday. It was great to finally really take the material apart and go through it with a fine comb. By the time of the shows everyone was feeling much more confident in their roles. The Newport performances were a great success and it was lovely to have a reception after both nights in which I met a lot of important people. It was lovely to meet London Ballet Circle member Jane Lambert on the Saturday evening.

Here are some photos taken during the dress rehearsal by Sian Trenberth.







On Sunday morning we left at 9.30 am to get to Bracknell for 3pm performance of Red Riding Hood. It was tough because the theatre was cold and this was day 7 for the company to work. The stage was not a bad size but the floor was quite hard. Because the show was early, the lights were being set as we did class. It is always interesting when there is a blackout during pirouettes!

Week 7

The company enjoyed 2 days rest after this in which we had various celebrations for Dylan's birthday. I really enjoyed going bowling for the first time!

On Tuesday and Wednesday we had a late class and a productive rehearsal of the opening of Red Riding Hood slotting Nathalie in and developing our motifs with Amy for the performances at Sadler's Wells and WMC.

On Thursday we toured to Taunton for our performance of Red Riding Hood. We had class at the theatre which was hard because I was wearing new Pointe shoes! I then helped out with a workshop before the performance. There was a real combination of ages and abilities, ranging from 14-18 with some having very little experience of ballet, and others being really quite talented. One boy in particular had a lot of potential and I was very surprised to hear that he was only training at a local dance school.

I think the workshop was run exceptionally well by Dylan. He seems to have just the right approach for that age range of young people, treating them more on an equal level, yet still putting them at their ease with quite a relaxed manner. The workshop began with a short class. I managed to correct some of the students at the barre although I have noticed that I tend to speak very quietly and generally need to be more authoritative! I still feel quite lacking in confidence when it comes to teaching this age range of students. At the end of the workshop there was a creative section where the students had to adapt some of the repertoire we had taught them to make up their own dance. It was interesting to see that one group really embraced this challenge with creativity, however everyone within the group did seem to know each other quite well. The other groups found this exercise challenging. I found myself asking the question how can we draw creativity out of people when they are a bit nervous and uneasy with themselves or a new situation? The same question emerged later, during the performance, when I was doing my own motif of choreography. The challenge I always face is remembering my material when I am nervous, as I tend to blank out on the order. Especially because we are dancing on different sized stages every night and we need to be able to adapt the work to fit in each theatre. With the performances of this ballet coming up in London and Cardiff I am now contemplating how I can change this. I think that some time to really rehearse in the studio next week will help a lot as so far we have had very little rehearsal time since I joined.

November 11th

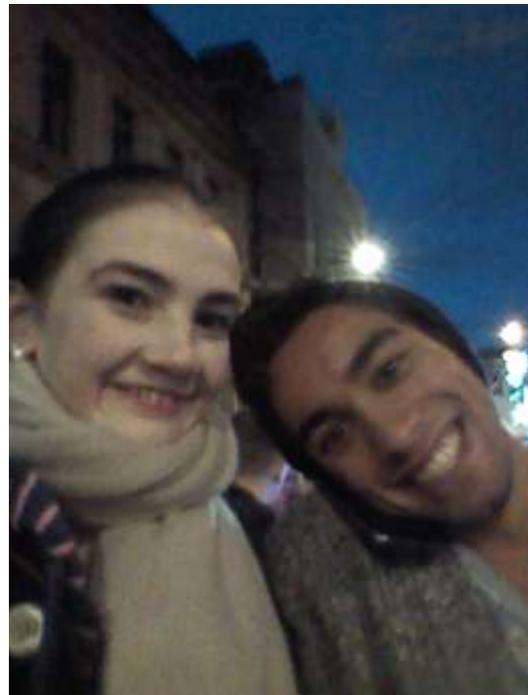
We made our way to Bridgewater at 10am. When we got there we discovered that we were a fair distance from the centre of town. So I embarked on a journey to the nearest supermarket. Found Sainsbury's eventually and then got back to the theatre to work on my BAPP

course and get ready for class .

The performance of Romeo and Juliet went well again. I must say that I do love performing Lady Capulet.

For the journey back I had more, good, philosophical discussions with Anna and Dylan and before we knew where we were, we were home!

The weekend was really nice with all the dancers going to Cardiff on Saturday night. There was also a carnival in Newport which I very much enjoyed going to with Miguel!



With Miguel at the Newport Carnival!

Two weeks with Tim Podesta and working towards performances at Sadler's Wells

Monday

Today we had Dan for class. I struggled with things today purely because I woke up at 3am this morning and could not get back to sleep. This made me consider just how much rest makes a difference to me as a dancer. I now feel very fortunate to ordinarily be a good sleeper! I found class hard stamina wise but then as the day went on I

felt more awake. We had a good rehearsal of Red Riding Hood in the morning in which it was beneficial to sort out the beginning of the ballet, adding the additional dancers. In the afternoon Tim Podesta began choreographing on us. Initially I was finding it very difficult to memorise his choreography, but I like the way that he works, as he gives time to the women, then allows them to get the material into their bodies whilst working with the men. It felt nice to be exploring a different way of moving.

Tuesday

This morning we had a challenging class with Tim, followed by some more rehearsals of his new choreography. His work is always a challenge especially the floor work, yet I feel like it is incredibly good for me! Then we rehearsed Red Riding Hood again in the afternoon, gradually pulling it together.

Wednesday

This was a tough day! The main focus of my day was the rehearsal with Tim. He had us in the studio for about 4 hours without a break! I discovered that I really need to work to control my anxiety when I am under pressure as I tend to lose my focus and forget choreography. Nevertheless, we are covering a lot of material and starting to really go through Red Riding Hood with a fine comb.

Thursday

We had a good class with Tim today. I am finding that his way of working the legs at the barre is very effective for me. It is a sort of active usage, which emphasises both the out and the in and I can really feel my whole leg working. I am very much enjoying Tim's choreography now. Once you get the material more into your body it starts to feel really quite special. I am also really enjoying being partnered by Dylan, he keeps me calm!

Friday

Today has been a bit of a mad panic to get Nathalie into all the Minpin sections of the ballet because we have a performance in Ilfracombe tomorrow. We only rehearsed until lunch time and then left on the minibus. We drove through the most horrific hail storm! It really was bad and poor Mike had to go round all the bending roads barely being able to see in front of him. A two and a half hour journey ended up being 4 hours.

When we got to Ilfracombe the whole company and Tim Podesta (who had also been on the bus with us through the awful weather) went to

Wetherspoons for dinner. It was great to chat with Tim outside of class and we had great fun when we went to a pool bar afterwards.

Saturday

I found today really tough. We had class with Tim and although the class was not hard I found that I could not pick up any of his exercises. I think I was very over tired looking back on the day now but earlier I just felt frustrated with myself about it to be honest. The performance went quite well though tonight and Tim said that it was a good show.



Some Pictures of Ilfracombe

Sunday

Today I rested and worked away at my degree! It was great to catch up on some blogging!

Monday

This morning I went to the gym to do some strength work, then I met Nathalie and joined her for one of her pilates classes. It was such a good class as although the exercises were actually quite simple, the focus on the breath really engaged my core and also helped me to relax.

Weather was shocking and I got totally soaked on the return journey, there was not a single item of clothing that wasn't completely drenched through!

Tuesday

Class with Darius today which was nice. I felt that yesterday's pilates class has made a real difference as I felt so centred. Then we had a productive rehearsal of the entrance and storm from Red Riding Hood. I feel like I finally have some idea of where I am going! Tim worked with us differently today, me and Robbie are now partners and he has started choreographing a pas de deux on us. It challenges my movement quality. I really need to work to show different dynamics as Tim has indicated this. Really tired by the end of the day but felt like I had really worked with a positive mindset today.

Wednesday

Class with Dan today. I cannot deny that I find Dan's classes a challenge. He always does plenty of grand pirouettes which is good for me because I do not find them easy. Again good rehearsals both for Tim's piece and Red Riding Hood.

Thursday

Today was nice we had a fund-raising event in the premises with lots of local people attending. We performed an extract from Red Riding Hood and the choreography that Tim had created so far. It went well and the response was excellent. I was considering today how I am beginning to find it easier to attend these sorts of events. It is always a challenge to face people you do not know but I think I am getting better at it!

Friday

Last day to get everything together before London. Just about managed it! We had a full run with costumes and everything today because some people from a nursing home came in for a showing. One lady was really enjoying it, she was following everything and wanted a picture with us at the end! Many of the residents fell asleep but the

over all response was a positive one.

After the showing we rehearsed some more and then packed everything up and put it into the van.

Saturday

Today I travelled to London. Met my mum who had a surprise excursion planned for my free day! The surprise turned out to be a visit to the exhibition of Rodin's dancers at Somerset House. It was incredible, I thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience. I feel like I have been craving some more cultural stimulation so I definitely needed this!

Then we went to Pizza Express for a lovely meal.



Snap shots from London!

Sunday

This morning I did a class at Dance Works which was great. It felt strange to go back because I haven't been there since before I graduated. Now to enter as a professional dancer was so odd! Then I met up with some school friends and had a good catch up. It was interesting to hear some of the experiences they have had with companies, some of which have shocking working conditions. I feel so fortunate to be working with Ballet Cymru. They definitely deal with us extremely fairly and the conditions of work are very good.

Week at Sadler's Wells!

Monday

Our first day at Sadler's Wells! I really enjoyed Amy's class on stage, lots of eating up the space! This is something that I now feel I am starting to enjoy more, as I have always had a tendency to dance very small and I cannot afford to do this because I am so long! After class we did a full run which was great because I knew the areas which were going to take more concentration for the show. After a good meal I felt much better and actually the performance ended up going really quite well. There was a great atmosphere in the audience, even though it was not a full house and everyone seemed to be very entertained.

The more I think about it, the more I realise that one of the reasons this ballet is so challenging is because if you are not on stage, you are either doing a quick change, quick changing someone else, moving the set or doing a fast cross over! The concentration required for the performance is extreme. At times I still find that my memory can fade, probably just from an overload of information. However, I am not blanking in my own passages of choreography any more which is good!



All the girls of the company after the show

Tuesday

My legs were very sore today but I enjoyed pushing through this because I know that ultimately it is at these times that I will gain strength. I feel that I am finally starting to let loose a bit more in my dancing and really go for it, rather than worrying about being

technically correct. We had a rehearsal of a few scenes and then a decent break before the second show. The atmosphere in the audience was not so great tonight and I was very frustrated because during one of my entrances in this ballet I have to bring a pig on wheels on and it got caught in the wing. Someone managed to unhook it but it fell on its side so I had to pull it on on its side! I was already on stage so there really was nothing that I could have done. I felt annoyed and as though I had spoiled the performance but tried to tell myself that there was nothing I could do and that I had not done it deliberately. Aside from this the performance was good and it was lovely to have two of my friends take company class and then watch the show. It made me consider how actually I think I do feel more confident when I have someone I know in the audience. Especially in this theatre, because the auditorium and stage are at such close proximity and it is possible to literally see everyone's faces.

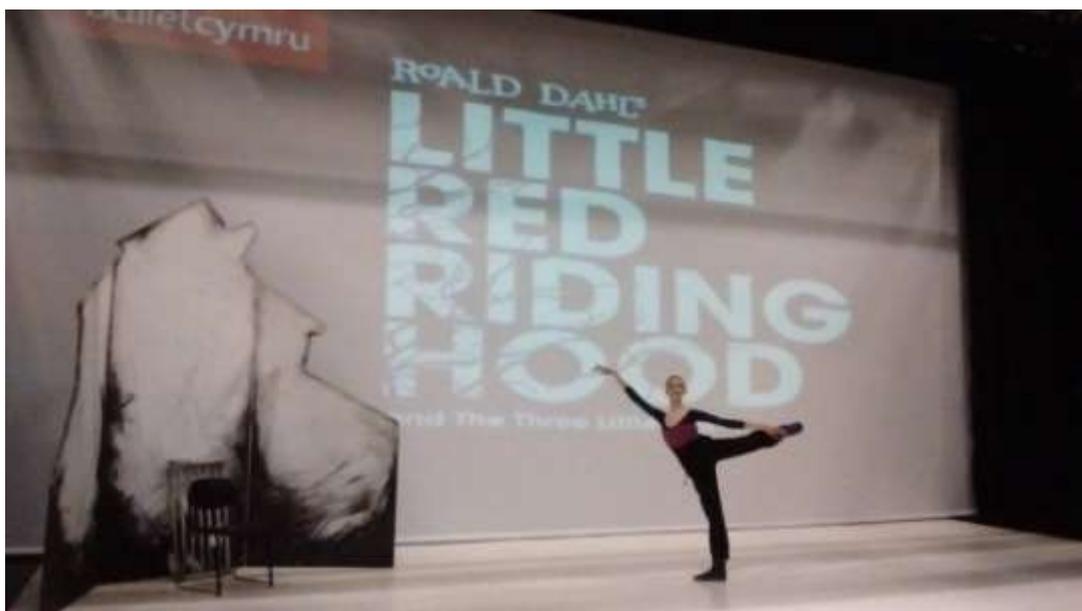


With Krystal and Anna after the show

Wednesday

Again a good class with Amy which the London Ballet Circle came to watch. I felt a bit nervous with them watching because they have sponsored my apprenticeship with the company and I wanted to make them feel proud. I did enjoy performing for them though. This was followed by a productive rehearsal of some of the minpin sections which were still a bit ragged because of so many cast changes. Then I practised my entrance with the pig about ten times until I was confident that I would not disrupt the production with it!

I thoroughly enjoyed this performance, I just felt so fortunate to be there dancing at Sadler's Wells.



Me at The Sadler's Wells Theatre!

Thursday

Today was a free day and although Mike drove most of the dancers back to Newport last night, I decided to stay with a friend in London so that I could visit school today. It was amazing to see everyone again and let them know everything I am doing and how much I am enjoying my time with Ballet Cymru. It was so special to return to school, as it made me realise just how fortunate I was to receive my

training in such a wonderful place. When I went in, it was as though I was returning home to see family and friends of the ballet world and I was very happy about this. The visit has inspired me to go and achieve more and more!

Friday

Today we spent some time in the studio preparing for the performance at the WMC. Useful time was spent and Darius advised us on the sections which we must pay careful attention to when working with the orchestra, as he said the timings and tempos may alter.

Rehearsing with The National Orchestra of Wales

Saturday 3rd December

Today we took class at the studio before travelling to Cardiff to rehearse with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. We rehearsed with them in their hall which thankfully was very sizeable. The floor was quite slippery and very hard though, so after initially wearing flat ballet shoes, I concluded that I would be better off barefoot. We ran the 2nd act first and the music sounded spectacular. Even though we were technically only marking, it was so evident that all of us dancers were feeling invigorated by the live accompaniment and by mid way through the 3 hour rehearsal I had to consciously restrict myself from jumping and running because I was a bit worried I might aggravate my achilles tendons for the performance tomorrow.

I found it interesting to see how the orchestra works by comparison to a ballet company. They are very, very strict with time management regardless of whether or not they have got to the end of the ballet. Having said this they are extremely efficient with time and I was surprised by how much we got done and how fast we achieved it today. I feel that the rehearsal today was very useful, because I now feel that I know what to expect in terms of changes in tempo and so on. It is quite a complex procedure because there are musical cues, dance cues and narration cues, all of which have to be unified and figured out.



During a rehearsal with the orchestra

*Performing at the Wales Millennium Centre Cardiff
Sunday 4th December*

I am still buzzing from today! It really was the most incredible experience to be performing on such a large stage. In fact it was so big that I had to add choreography to get from one side of the stage to the other! What was even more special though was having the 70 instrument orchestra behind us on the stage. The score sounds so different to the 20 instrument recording that we normally use. The whole score sounds so much richer and I found that I wanted to move in different ways because of it. I think live music most definitely contributes to the natural spontaneity of this ballet. Certain difficulties in terms of differences in tempo did arise, especially because the conductor had his back to us, however there were surprisingly few actually and generally I could feel the changes, because the power of the instruments is so forceful from such a large orchestra.

What was also incredible was that the auditorium was practically full, with over 1,700 tickets sold. Dancing to such a large audience, strangely gave me more confidence, perhaps also because the venue is so large and so there is a greater distance between the performers and the audience. I found that I was much more nervous for the performances at Sadler's Wells.

I feel that this experience has really enriched my life. I have never felt the happiness that I felt with the orchestra today and I think it has also boosted my confidence so that next time I have to do something with live musicians, I know what to expect.

I also put myself into the shoes of our director Darius James and his wife and assistant director Amy Doughty today and thought about how happy they must feel. Darius has been working at this company

for 30 years and a few years ago it started receiving Arts Council funding. Today marked a special occasion because the company was on the main stage at the WMC alongside The National Orchestra of Wales for the first time, with an audience of over 1,700 and a great response in the curtain calls. It really was a landmark moment and I think they must feel very proud. I feel so honoured to be a part of this company.

After the performance we all returned to Newport and I met my family who had come to see me perform before going for a well needed burger!



After the rehearsal at the WMC

Final week!

Monday and Tuesday of this week were rest days which I must say I really needed. The last 12 weeks are now starting to catch up with me and I am starting to feel a bit exhausted. Also getting a bit behind with my degree work so I spent the majority of my time studying and then went to the gym on Tuesday to get myself going again for the final few days.

Wednesday

Today we were performing Red Riding Hood in Farnham. A very small theatre with a pitch black backstage area. It was such a contrast to the WMC that it took some time to adjust to the new space. A few people fell over in this performance because the floor was a bit uneven! No one was hurt though. Back to Newport after the show, arriving at midnight!

Thursday

Today we had a rehearsal in the studio as well as the audition for the new pre-professional programme which the company is launching next year. I saw some of my old school friends at the audition which was nice.

The best thing by far about this day though was that I had my interview with Darius and Amy and they told me that they would like to have me back next year on full contract as a full company member! I cannot describe the happiness I felt inside! I am so, so excited and honoured!

Friday

Today was the first performance of Romeo and Juliet in about a month and it actually went surprisingly well as we have not even had a rehearsal of it. It was lovely to get back in to the role of Lady Capulet which I must say, I have missed in the last few weeks. We were performing in Newtown and my family came to watch as it is quite close to my home town.

Saturday

Performed at Stourbridge today. A lovely theatre with an unfortunately steep rake! Even so, the performance went well and there was a very good audience! Travelled half way to Aberystwyth after the show.

Sunday

Our final performance in Aberystwyth! A lovely stage and I thoroughly enjoyed doing Lady Capulet for the final time! It was quite sad at the end of the performance as the break is so long now but I am very excited for next year as Anna, me and Miguel are going to be sharing a flat together. I am also very much looking forward to returning home for Christmas and seeing my family!



*Anna and I on our final journey to Aberystwyth!
Below are two pieces of work which I created to help me to develop the
roles I was dancing this season with Ballet Cymru. I thought I would
share them with you!*

Developing my Minpin character for Little Red Riding Hood and The Three Little Pigs with Ballet Cymru

For the ballet *Little Red Riding Hood and The Three Little Pigs* which I am currently performing with Ballet Cymru, I am dancing a Minpin which is a forest sprite. The ballet is based on Roald Dahl's version of the tale from his book *Revoltin' Rhymes*. He also wrote a book called *The Minpins*. Minpins are little people who live in the forest and these have been incorporated into the company's production of the ballet. We are the characters which back up the story. Over the next few weeks we are performing at Sadler's Wells in London and the WMC in Cardiff. So to help me with the characterisation of my role I have created a reflection of my Minpin personality and movement quality. I have also created a collage to help me make sense of the role creatively.

My Minpin personality

I am inquisitive and thoughtful but I tend to get quite frantic and am easily shocked and excited.

My Minpin movement quality

Lyrical, stretchy, long, linear, mystical, exotic.

I find this role actually challenges me quite a lot, as although it is technically not too bad and there is a lot of my own choreography within it, I actually find it harder not to be a ballet dancer and to get into the rather comical personality! Also because I only had 5 days to learn to ballets when I joined the company in September, I had to perform the ballet before I was feeling confident in what I was doing. Then I have been refining as I have gone a long. However, this has been a challenge because there have also been a number of changes of cast, with new dancers popping in and out so our space is always changing. I think that this ballet has really helped me to develop my confidence on stage though just through having to perform even though I was not feeling overly confident in what I was doing to begin with. Naturally I have some perfectionist tendencies so I really feel that this has benefited me. It is also great fun to be apart of this ballet

Dahl, Roald (2013) *The Minpins*, 3rd ed, London: Puffin Books
pp 19,26,27 and front cover
Photographs taken by Lydia Arnoux

Developing the role of Lady Capulet for Romeo and Juliet with Ballet Cymru

The other ballet which I have been touring with Ballet Cymru this season is Romeo and Juliet. In this ballet I am dancing the role of Lady Capulet. In this version Lady Capulet is a complex figure. She is a dominating woman who wants her daughter to be married to Paris, Juliet's suitor. She herself has been unhappily married to a man she does not love, Lord Capulet. She is actually having an affair with Tybalt and at his death scene she shows how passionately she loved him through her total devastation. She begins the ballet with power and authority. This gradually turns to anger towards her daughter as Juliet becomes more and more insistent that she does not want to marry Paris. Eventually, seeing how upset her daughter is, she is overcome by a profound feeling of guilt, she realises that she does not want her daughter to live a life in a marriage to a man she does not love as she has done. She reaches out to help her daughter but she does not know how. She has always relied upon the nurse to care for her. It is at this point that she realises her inadequacies as a mother. When she enters the room and finds Juliet dead on her bed, she blames herself for everything and takes responsibility for her death. She will never forgive herself for what happened.

This role has been extremely challenging for me, it is a very powerful role and takes an exceptional degree of maturity. I am only two years older than the dancer dancing Juliet so I have to really work to achieve that level of maturity. The style of choreography is also quite sharp and angular which is not my natural movement quality. I absolutely love this role though, the characterisation and feeling that it requires inspires me every time I perform it. Prokofiev's score is what helps me most to absorb myself in the role as its power and depth

encourages emotional investment.

Here are some words which I find useful to think about when I am developing my character:

Regal

Powerful

sinister

Proud

complicated

sad

unhappy

commanding

dominating

cold

frightening

Lady Capulet is a woman who is stuck within a society of arranged marriages and the restrictions of social class, yet beneath it all she ultimately wants the best for her daughter.

When getting inside this character I was considering reading the play, however I had very short notice before having to perform it and actually felt that the role would evolve with me. Therefore, I did not use any other source when developing the role. It was almost as though I had to delve down inside myself and find a characterisation which was sincere. I often use this method in fact, because often when I watch videos of other dancers I find it is too easy to make the work a replica of theirs. One method I use when I am on stage is to have words and feelings and say them inside my head. Also in the death scene of both Tybalt and Juliet I use the names of the actual dancers in my head instead of their characters. This helps me to imagine what I would really do in that situation and how I would really feel if they were lying there dead. As horrible as this can sound it does create a much more sincere performance.

I have created this collage in order to make sense of my character creatively. It is quite noticeable just how different this character is to the minpin character from Little Red Riding Hood. The richness of the materials I was drawn to show the wealth, depth and regal nature of Lady Capulet.



Photographs

Top and bottom by Sian Trenberth

Middle by Lydia Arnoux