***Ballet Shoes* Audio Introduction**

Thank you for booking tickets to an audio-described performance of *Ballet Shoes*. Katy Rudd (*The Ocean at the End of the Lane)* returns to the National Theatre to direct this spectacular re-imagining of Noel Streatfeild’s beloved novel, in a new version by Kendall Feaver (*The Almighty Sometimes*).The running time is approximately 2 hours and 40 minutes, including a 20 minute interval.

Touch Tours will precede the audio-described performances, an hour and a half before the start time. Patrons attending a touch tour should meet staff in the Olivier theatre stalls foyer.

This introduction will be repeated live fifteen minutes before the performance begins.  This allows us to give you extra information about the production, if needed. This will also enable you to familiarize yourself with the headsets.

Please note that this production contains themes of adoption and death and is suitable for ages 7+.

*In a crumbling house full of dinosaur bones and fossils, three adopted sisters – Pauline, Petrova and Posy – are learning who they are and what they want to be.*

*Under the watchful eyes and guidance of their guardian Sylvia, Nana, and some unlikely lodgers, they fight to pursue their individual passions. But in a world that wasn’t built for women with big ambitions, can they forge a future, keep their family together, and even learn a dance or two along the way?*

The action is set in 1930s. There are 11 main characters as well as an ensemble of mixed gender and ethnicity, who play a host of smaller characters, and also help to transform the space into the many different places we visit. The ensemble are out in the audience before the play starts. They’re dressed as ballet dancers in deep blue-green costumes, everyone wearing a wrap-around ballet cardigan, with matching netted tutu, tights and ballet shoes. They chat to members of the audience, or do stretching exercises using the stair rails as a ballet barre. When the ensemble are playing other parts during the action, they keep their blue-green tutus and tights but change the top half of their costume. For example, a seedy theatre manager with a moustache might be wearing a blazer, shirt and tie, and bowler hat but still be in a tutu on his bottom half.

The main location of the story is the house at 999 Cromwell Road. This is created with a space open to us that feels like we have just stepped into the entrance hall of a big town-house. The room is set at an angle, with two rear walls meeting in a corner at the back of the stage. It is two storeys high, with an open landing at first floor level to access the doors of different bedrooms and bathrooms.

The place is more like an old fashioned museum than a family home. The walls are completely covered with cabinets, shelves and cubby-holes, all of which are crammed full of curious objects. There are fossils, dinosaur bones, skeletons, stuffed animals, shells, fish bones, collections of starfish, large eggs and dusty books. The collection takes up all the wall space, disappearing into the darkness high above the stage, and a bridge of more shelves and boxes spans right over the front of the stage forming a jumbled arch. In amongst the shelves are a number of paintings of dinosaur-like creatures, but painted in strange vivid pearly colours – dinosaurs of the imagination. They sometimes light up from within, glowing in the dimness.

The walls, shelves and wooden floor are painted the same dark blue, making the place feel rather gloomy. But lots of small lamps perched among the fossils and bones give out a warm glow. There’s a roll-top desk on the far left of the ground floor, and an upright piano over to the right.

The house belongs to fossil-hunter Great Uncle Matthew, otherwise known as **GUM**. Gum is a rather eccentric white man in his fifties, who often takes himself off on expeditions to look for fossils and bones. He has unruly dark hair which is going grey at the temples, and a thick moustache. We first meet him doing a lecture while showing slides on a screen. He wears a tweed hunting jacket, belted at the waist. It is brown with a bold red check. Under the jacket is a white shirt and dark red silk cravat He has baggy brown trousers which are tucked into gaiters from the knee down – these are fabric that’s wound around the lower leg to protect from mud. Gum wears brown hiking boots.

At the beginning of the play he goes on a number of expeditions, with the ensemble creating a series of whirling transformations. The lecture screen is joined by two more rectangles of white cloth, held up on poles and arranged to suggest the sails of a ship on the high seas. The cloth billows and the walls are covered in rippling blue light. Gum stands wearing an oil cloth coat and sou’wester, moving gently as though the ship is swaying. Another expedition takes him up some snowy mountains. The set of steps that lead up to the gallery are wheeled forward to suggest a rugged slope, with a sheep stranded on top. Gum wears a fur jacket and a red cap that covers his ears.

In charge of the house is Miss Guthridge, or **Nana**. She’s a short round white woman, with her grey hair set into a neat bun. Her uniform is a white dress with thin grey stripes. It has a small white collar, puff shoulders and white sleeves, and has a white apron at the front. When going out of the house, Nana wears the regulation dark blue cape and cloche hat. Nana provides a still contained presence, in the chaotic world of the excitable Gum.

**Sylvia** is a young woman with light brown skin and black hair scraped behind her ears and hanging in ringlets to shoulder-length. When we first meet her she’s only eleven, and wears a black and white check school dress, with a blue jacket over the top. Her hair is worn up under a large grey beret. Later she changes into dungarees and a blue stripey top, sometimes putting on a pale blue oversize blouse to protect her clothes. She usually wears high-waisted trousers in practical thick cotton, and a neat blouse or sweater.

The house at Cromwell Road becomes home to three girls, who all start as babies, where they are little more than a small bundle of cloth.

We first meet them, though, in a school playground with a load of other girls – played by the ensemble. They wear school uniforms typical of the nineteen thirties, with white blouses, pale green pinafore dresses and round straw hats.

The girls change into a series of outfits throughout the action, but each girls has her signature colour, which extends to the blankets on their beds.

**Pauline** is has mid-brown skin, with neck-length black hair, pinned back at either side. She wears skirts and jackets in greens and blues. She’s dynamic but tends to scowl at the world, and is not afraid to fight her own corner. She sometimes hunches and slouches when in a bad mood, but when she's feeling confident she holds herself up, her eyes glinting with defiance and a grounded stance.

**Petrova** has a square face, tanned complexion, broad shoulders and determined stance. She wears mauve and brown, and is often in shorts, a shirt and sleeveless pullover. She throws herself into situations with gusto, but her face often betrays a lack of confidence especially when in dance classes, her wide eyes scanning around to see what others are doing. When she's in company she likes, she relaxes, lounging around with an easy-going air.

The youngest girl is **Posy** who has pale skin, and long flame red hair. She wears pale orange and peach dresses. Quite slightly built, her movements often seem a little awkward, as if trying to get used to her growing limbs. She holds herself very upright and moves quickly and lightly. Her face is very expressive, moving from huge bright grin to a deep frown of concentration in an instant.

Over the course of the action, Nana and Sylvia take in lodgers.

The first we meet is **Theo Dane**, a dance teacher. A woman in her forties with dark brown skin, Theo wears a series of colourful and theatrical outfits; silk baggy trousers in pink or maroon and worn with sparking or satin tops in ivory or pale green. Over the top are long, loose jackets in shades of orange - printed fabrics or crushed velvet. Her hair is in long braids wound round and piled on top of her head, held in place with a colourful headscarf. In her room is a trunk of fancy costumes from her various rolls, glittery, rich and feathery, they are a splash of bright colour in the otherwise dark and gloomy house. Theo dances with lots of energy, jiving and improvising with enthusiasm and an expressive face. As a teacher she can have a somewhat stern authority but when she's dancing or goofing around with the girls she is warm and playful.

Next is **Doctor Jakes**. She’s an older woman with pale skin, with short neatly parted white hair. She’s much more conventionally dressed in a white blouse, fastened with a broach at the neck, and a maroon two-piece suit, with a long skirt and brown shoes. She arrives wearing a charcoal raincoat and carrying a satchel. Her room contains a couple of armchairs and a tea table. She has decorated the wall with a number of black and white photographs, and in her room swaps the suit jacket for a long, bright pink housecoat. Dr Jakes is very contained, standing with hands clasped and carrying herself in a respectable fashion, but she also has a twinkle in her eye and perks up when she meets a challenge.

The third lodger drives onto the stage in an open-top 1930s car. He is **Jai Saran**, a tall Indian man in his thirties, with short, neat black hair and light brown skin. He has high cheekbones, big brown eyes, and a warm, friendly manner, quick to smile. He first arrives wearing a smart pale grey suit, with white shirt and tie, and a beige overcoat. Later he puts on greasy overalls to protect his clothes when working on his car. He is physically awkward when he dances but doesn't care, grinning playfully.

There are several free-standing pieces of scenery that are moved around to create different rooms in the house, and other location outside it. There are two doors that come with shelves built around and over them, they are turned and position to create rooms or corridors, and sometimes a glass window with '999 Cromwell Road' etched in the glass is added above to create the big front door of the house. A bathroom is formed by wheeling in a large bath and small free-standing basin. To create the a bedroom for three girls, the door is placed to the left, with two beds to the right. A third bed is created with a mattress on a waist-high shelf. There’s a little window to the right. A Welsh dresser and kitchen table are wheeled in create the kitchen.

The girls enrol at the Children's Academy of Dancing and Stage Training.

To create dance studio, five mirrors are wheeled in, each with strip lights down the side. There are also some moveable ballet barres – long horizontal rails which the dancers use to steady themselves, while doing their exercises.

Heading the Academy is stern **Madame Fidolia**, played by the same actor who plays Gum. She’s a tall woman, in her sixties, made taller by her headdress, like a turban with plaits of black and red fabric wound around the top. She peers over wire-frame glasses and wears a dark red dress, beneath a long, fur trimmed batwing cape. Madame walks with the aid of a silver-topped cane – her back straight and each step very deliberate, smooth and unhurried. The cane is also used in class, tapped on the floor to keep time or emphasise an instruction.

We meet many other children training to dance and act, but one of them who auditions alongside Pauline for the role of Alice is **Winifred**, a young woman with pale skin and blond curly crimped hair cut in a bob. She’s bright and enthusiastic.

Several plays-within-the-play occur, including a production of Alice in Wonderland. A colourful theatre arch is lowered across the centre of the space, and the stage and auditorium are filled with colourful characters from the story, including the white rabbit, the mad hatter, the Queen of Hearts and a number of dancing playing cards.

Another play is a futuristic take on A Midsummer Nights Dream, performed by actors wearing costumes made of stiff structures in black, white, silver and yellow, built from industrial materials. Bottom's donkey head is made from sections of metal pipe welded at an angle, a fairy has 2 metre long arms made from ribbed silver ventilation pipe. Other characters have head or hands replaced by bright yellow cones or spheres, and wear spectacles with black and white stripy lenses.

On a film set for a production about King Charles II, a tall male actor performs the role in a long curly dark brown wig, and is draped in blue and white frills and sashes, with satin breeches. He can't stop eating the free buffet food, shoving it into his cheeks like a hamster to step into the scene and deliver his lines. The actress playing his royal sister wears a full-skirted peach satin gown with purple train and white lacy frills at the sleeves.

The director of the plays is always performed by the same actor who plays Gum and Madame Fidolia. As the director, he has short bleached blonde hair, a black turtleneck sweater and brown slacks with braces.

Credits

Cast (in alphabetical order)

Ensemble - Stacy Abalogun

Ensemble - Eryck Brahmania

Young Juliette Manoff / Ballerina / Ensemble - Cordelia Braithwaite

Ensemble - Michelle Cornelius

Winifred / Ensemble - Sonya Cullingford

Petrova Fossil - Yanexi Enriquez

Nana (Miss Guthridge) - Jenny Galloway

Ensemble - Courtney George

The Prince / Ensemble - Georges Hann

Theo Dane - Nadine Higgin

Pianist / Ensemble - Nuwan Hugh Perera

Ensemble - Philip Labey

Doctor Jakes - Helena Lymbery

Ensemble - Sharol Mackenzie

Sylvia (Garnie) - Pearl Mackie

Katerina Federovsky / Ensemble - Xolisweh Ana Richards

Jai Saran - Sid Sagar

Pauline Fossil - Grace Saif

Great Uncle Matthew (GUM) / Madame Fidolia - Justin Salinger

Posy Fossil - Daisy Sequerra

Ensemble - Katie Singh

All other roles played by members of the company.

Off-Stage Swings - Luke Cinque-White and Katie Lee

Musicians

Conductor - Gavin Sutherland

Alto Saxophone / Flute / Alto Flute/ Clarinet - Andy Findon

Alto Saxophone / Flute / Clarinet / Baritone Saxophone - Jennie Chilton

Tenor Saxophone / Clarinet / Bass Clarinet / Flute - Chris Caldwell

Oboe / Cor Anglais - Rachel Harwood-White

French Horn - Anna Douglass

Trumpet - Mike Lovatt, Ryan Quigley, Angela Whelan

Trombone (Tenor) - Ed Tarrant

Bass Trombone / Tuba - Andy Wood

Kit / Percussion - Matt Senior

Harp - Louisa Duggan

Keys / Piano - Matt Regan

Violin 1 (Leader) - Gabrielle Lester

Violin 2 - Jeremy Isaac

Viola - Rachel Roberts

Cello - Bozidar Vukotic

Upright and Electric Bass - Don Richardson

Director - Katy Rudd

Set Designer - Frankie Bradshaw

Costume Designer - Samuel Wyer

Choreographer - Ellen Kane

Composer - Asaf Zohar

Dance Arrangements and Orchestration - Gavin Sutherland

Lighting Designer - Paule Constable

Sound Designer - Ian Dickinson for Autograph

Video Designer - Ash J Woodward

Illusions - Chris Fisher

Casting - Bryony Jarvis-Taylor

Classical Coach - Cira Robinson

Dialect Coach - Penny Dyer

Voice Coaches - Cathleen McCarron and Tamsin Newlands

Associate Set Designer - Natalie Johnson

Associate Choreographer - Jonathan Goddard

Swing Consultant - Eddie Slattery

Fight Director - Haruka Kuroda

Staff Director - Aaliyah Mckay

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