



LONDON CHILDREN'S BALLET

Annual Report 2017



Introduction

The core mission of London Children's Ballet (LCB) is to inspire and educate through dance. We do this by commissioning new narrative ballets that are performed typically in a major London theatre each year by a company of talented young dancers, and by introducing new audiences to ballet through our outreach work. Our popular productions are the primary way that LCB develops young dancers as well as up-and-coming choreographers, composers and designers. Our subsequent outreach work enables us to engage with audiences who would never usually consider attending a ballet or who are physically unable to do so.

The 2017 production of *The Secret Garden* was a tremendous success. Following competitive auditions 31 young dancers were selected to be part of LCB's main company, and a further 45 children were invited to join LCB's touring companies. *The Secret Garden* was performed to full houses over five performances at The Lyric Hammersmith on Tuesday 30th and Wednesday 31st May. Nearly 500 tickets were offered to charities and schools for only £1 each. Touring companies brought an abridged version of this ballet and of LCB's previous ballet (*Little Lord Fauntleroy*) to 2,230 people in the community in February, July and September.

THE PRODUCTION

Ballet in a Box

For 23 years, LCB has created beautiful, original, two-act narrative ballet productions, performed in the West End, which have then been shortened and adapted for outreach performances in special needs schools and care homes. Through a normal LCB season, 60 young dancers receive upward of 100 hours of free expert training and performance experience as part of the Company's all-child West End cast. A further 48 children would train as one of three small outreach companies, performing to over 3,000 people in community venues.

It has been a long-established ambition of the Charity to offer excellent and exciting performance opportunities to children who live beyond the reach of our 60-dancer, London-based Company. It has also been our goal to give greater exposure to the exceptionally talented choreographers and composers who create our ballets; artistic works which until now have remained 'on the shelf' from the time they are first performed until restaged by LCB.

At the same time, the Charity has been increasingly conscious of the infinite interest from potential LCB 'outreach venues' (care homes and special needs schools) eager to receive performances and workshops for their residents and students. The Charity, however, has not had the capacity to deliver more than 30 outreach performances per year, nor indeed travel beyond Greater London due to the geographical base of its young dancers.

This year, LCB's core programmes sought to address these issues and opportunities through a new initiative, Ballet in a Box.

The Secret Garden – LCB's first 'Ballet in a Box'

For the first time, in 2017 LCB created as its main annual production a shorter ballet of *The Secret Garden* in a format that would be suitable both for the public stage and for local community-based performances. The intention was to condense LCB's 80-minute ballet into a 40-minute performance.

The challenge of condensing the story without losing its charm was immense, and it was decided that the ballet would be punctuated by narrations between scenes, based on passages from Frances Hodgson Burnett's original book, which helped younger audiences follow the story. It was a great honour that Juliet Stevenson CBE accepted LCB's invitation to be the voice of these narrations, and she graciously gave her time and talent in support of the Charity.

Working with the original composer of LCB's *The Secret Garden*, Artem Vassiliev, an abridged 40-minute score of this ballet was written and professionally recorded with a full orchestra.

The final 40-minute production of *The Secret Garden* was staged at the Lyric Hammersmith over five performances on 30th and 31st May 2017. Despite the fact that LCB was performing in a new theatre with a new format, and that the shows were scheduled during a school holiday for the first time in the Charity's history, LCB achieved a full house at every performance with little additional marketing. This unanticipated level of success helped LCB to understand its audience better; we were delighted to learn that there is considerable public interest in ballet productions that engage younger audiences, and we were equally delighted to learn that LCB's audience is more faithful to our brand than we expected, willing to follow us to the new theatre.

Though the audience experience was different this year, the life-changing experience for the children chosen to dance in the Company was the same. Thirty young dancers (girls aged 9-14, boys aged 9-16) were chosen for the Company of *The Secret Garden* compared to our usual 60 dancers, due to the smaller size of the performance stage at the Lyric Hammersmith. The Company worked with choreographer Erico Montes and Ballet Mistress Gemma Pitchley-Gale, both First Artists with The Royal Ballet, with additional coaching from Sabina Cox, a former Soloist with The Royal Ballet. The stunning calibre of coaching this year led to one of the cleanest and most professional productions that LCB has produced, with children challenged to dance corps de ballet scenes using lines and patterns usually only expected of professional companies. It was an experience that the children relished.

Teacher and Ballet School engagement

LCB invited ballet teachers from a broad mix of ballet schools to come to one of the theatre performances and attend a briefing session with the Charity. The goal was to gauge interest in LCB's Ballet in a Box scheme, and to receive feedback on our model.

Eighteen ballet schools expressed an interest in participating in Ballet in a Box once the 'product' is ready, 15 of which sent representatives to LCB's teacher's briefing at the Lyric Hammersmith. The majority of teachers engaging with the concept were from schools within the catchment area of our main company, as they are already familiar with London Children's Ballet. A key priority in autumn 2017 and spring 2018 will be to develop relationships with ballet schools in areas with less arts provision that are further from London, starting with the North East and the South West, pursuing a number of LCB relationships in those areas.

Product development

The staged ballet has been filmed in its entirety, and therefore the wide angle recording of the choreography and the full orchestral score is ready for inclusion in the Ballet in a Box product. LCB is currently developing the contents of the package that will be offered to ballet schools, which will include instruction manuals and templates, coaching videos, legal agreements, costume maker manuals and more. LCB is also developing a sensible funding model, which will include a sliding scale of financial contributions from larger ballet schools.

OUTREACH

LCB Touring Companies

LCB tours an abridged version of its ballets to community venues with the aim of introducing ballet to new audiences and developing its social impact. After the performances of *The Secret Garden* at the Lyric Hammersmith concluded, the ballet was suitably adapted for touring to small community spaces. Throughout the year, LCB sent four small touring companies to 38 venues, bringing the music, choreography and stunning costumes to some of London's most isolated groups who cannot access the theatre. Among the venues that receive LCB tours in 2017 were residential care homes, hospices and schools for children with special needs.

For each tour performance, dancers performed in full costumes from the Lyric production with the dancers each performing up to three different roles to tell the story.

LCB Touring Companies provides a way to extend the LCB experience to additional children who came close but did not quite make it into the main performance company. These children are given a week of intensive ballet tuition and rehearsal time, with one-to-one attention that often results in the children being selected for the main company the following year. Performing at the Lyric Hammersmith this year made it necessary to have a smaller Company than usual, with 31 dancers compared to the usual 60. LCB decided to add an extra touring company this year so there was not a substantial decrease in the number of children benefitting from the LCB performance experience. A total of 45 dancers were members of the touring company in 2017.

The tour provides isolated elderly people in residential homes a rare opportunity to see young children perform in a vibrant display of dance with stunning costumes to beautifully played music, written especially to accompany the ballet. After performing, the dancers mingle with the residents to talk about the performance and give them a chance to admire the costumes close-up. For children in special educational needs schools the tour offers a rare chance to see their peers performing. Ballet is particularly fascinating to children who have difficulty with verbal communication and they can enjoy the story unfolding by way of dance, mime, music and costume. After the performance the children are encouraged to learn mime, try ballet movements, try the costumes and interact with the LCB dancers.

LCB Touring Company completed four tours in 2017: one in February, two in July and one in September, bringing stunning short ballets of *The Secret Garden* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy* to a combined audience of 2,230 people at 38 venues across Greater London.

Ballet for £1 Programme

To fulfil its mission to bring ballet to new audiences, the charity offers 25 percent of its tickets to disadvantaged primary schools (those based in areas of social deprivation, schools that have a broad ethnic mix, a high level of children on free school meals and very little access to the arts) for just £1 a ticket. We also identify charities working with some of the most isolated people in London – the elderly, sick and disabled. These schools and charities were invited to bring their beneficiaries to LCB's performances, providing access to live theatre to people who would not usually be able to attend.

This year *Ballet for £1* trialled a new format at the Lyric Hammersmith, with participants invited to all shows rather than the usual two dedicated matinee performances. We invited charities and schools from boroughs close to Hammersmith as the performance time was shorter. As performances were during half term, large groups and classes from schools could not be invited; instead, schools were offered tickets to distribute to families who they felt would benefit from the experience. LCB has always been conscious that the children reached through this initiative often have no experience of the arts both because the family is unable to afford tickets but also because it is outside the families' realm of experience.

A total of 499 tickets were distributed through Ballet for £1 in 2017, with attendees from ten London boroughs. For 79% of the children attending from schools, *The Secret Garden* was their first experience of ballet and 50% had never experienced any kind of theatre before. 79% of all children attending the performance expressed great enjoyment of the ballet. Of the charity groups attending, 96% said they enjoyed the ballet greatly.

TRAINING

Masterclass and Summer School

The masterclasses, led by Royal Ballet dancer Nathalie Harrison, took place in March 2017 at Sadler's Wells Lilian Baylis studio. Children who were unsuccessful at auditions were invited to attend an LCB Masterclass, which focussed on audition and performance technique, helping children to have confidence in presentation and performance. This is a key skill for any dancer, and helps the children feel more confident for future ballet exams, auditions and performances.

LCB ran a two-week summer school for girls in July and August 2017. The first week was for 9-12 year olds and the second for 12-16 year olds. Eighty-six children took part and five children received full grants. The week included a variety of classes including a daily ballet class, LCB repertoire, jazz and contemporary. Students also benefited from workshops in musical theatre, mime and stage make up as well as performances from professional ballet and contemporary dancers. Of the children who attended, 94% said that they now felt more confident to audition and 79% said they felt more confident about their performance skills.

SUPPORTERS

LCB would like to thank the following for generously supporting the charity's work this year:

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Graham and Jackie Brown
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Jonathan and Medina Marks

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APPENDIX 1: Company Parent Feedback



Luke has always loved ballet but being able to perform in a production like this has been amazing. There are no other children's ballet companies that offer this for free! It's a huge struggle for us to pay for Luke's ballet training so to be part of LCB in this way is simply incredible. Luke has made friends for life and will never forget the enormous privilege that being part of LCB for three seasons has entailed. His ballet has improved so much thanks to all the expert teaching and being on stage has made him realise that this is what he wants to do.

When Luke was first accepted into LCB for 'Snow White' in 2015 we began to take his ballet potential more seriously and this has given us the confidence to apply for vocational ballet school. In September, he starts full time at White Lodge! We will keep in touch and we can't wait to be in the audience at the Peacock Theatre next year!

Abigail, parent of Luke



Being amongst likeminded children has built Samantha's confidence and she now realises that she is not different when in the company of other children who share her passion and determination to succeed in dance.

Samantha has every intention in pursuing a career in ballet and LCB has given her a taste of what to expect and the process of training and rehearsing and working towards a professional production, and it has made her more determined than ever. As a parent LCB has offered us a unique opportunity to observe Samantha going through this process and is an experience that will stay with us forever.

Julie, parent of Samantha



I am not sure there are any words to express my gratitude for this experience Rio had. Watching all the children stirred emotions I did not think I would have upon watching the performances. To see my child or any child achieve their dreams to early on in life is truly remarkable to see and LCB made this all possible, so thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Charmaine, parent of Rio

I will keep this short and to the point. My child suffers from anxiety and learning difficulties. Dance helps a challenging adolescence make sense of the world. She would have given up had it not been for this opportunity, it was a realisation to her that she needs dance in her life and gains a great deal of enjoyment and confidence from her natural abilities. Thank you LCB.

Company Parent 2017

APPENDIX 2: Ballet for £1 feedback

Feedback from group leaders and participants:

This is our 3rd year and it was simply amazing! The £1 ticket enabled us to offer a package and make a day of it which included a return coach travel and lunch in the lyric bar and grill. Thank you for making this possible. Our group wanted more and are still talking about the ballet, the costumes and what a fun day they had at the ballet! It was nice of Lucille to introduce herself and take a picture of the group. There was 47 of us in total. Those who took part in the interviews loved the experience too. Once again, thank you everyone at LCB for making our day at the Ballet a memorable one.

Age UK Croydon Group Leader

The group was made up of current service and ex-service users who now volunteer for Barnardo's support the charity and the current service provided in the Brent Children's centres. They have fed back that the opportunity was amazing and a really positive and enjoyable experience for both adults and children. The LCB service is amazing. You open up opportunities to families who may not be able to afford or may not have thought of attending Ballet. Thank you!

Wykeham Children's Centre (Barnardo's) Group Leader

Very inspirational, made us happier, forgot about our aches and pains

Age UK Croydon Participant

I have not been to the ballet before and therefore have never taken my sons, although I really enjoy going to the theatre. During my son's illness, we were unable to be in crowded places and so have not been to the theatre for 2 years. His illness made life unpredictable, which made it hard to plan ahead/ book tickets for activities and events, so it is great to have something like this organised for us to enjoy, thank you!

Starlight Children's Foundation Participant

APPENDIX 3: LCB Touring Companies feedback**Feedback from care home venues:**

It brought excitement for many of our residents as they waited for the day of the performance to arrive. It brought much joy and fond memories. They enjoy having reminiscing sessions after about dance, theatre and their earlier days. They really enjoy watching the children perform and admire their talent.

A lovely young feeling, able to communicate with your lovely dancers.

Our seniors benefit greatly from intergenerational events. Love watching and talking to youngsters.

Feedback from Special Educational Needs schools:

*Because of our student difficulties with receptive language they all love the experience of watching dance. The part they love most is the interaction with the dancers (who are truly marvellous with our SEN students). **Ann Sullivan, Parayhouse***

This is a very exciting event for us. We have little in the way of arts groups visiting us. You are the only dance group that comes here. On a multi-sensory level: dance, music, costume, storytelling – the performance is great for us. Movement is so important for health- many of our pupils have complex health needs. Thank you from everyone at Highshore!

Eileen Ollieuz, Head Teacher, Highshore School

They love watching the ballet performances from up close – in a theatre they would be sitting much too far from the stage. As our pupils have a wide range of difficulties they may find some performances difficult to access-but music, dance, movement are accessible and enjoyable to all abilities. Our pupils very much enjoy the interactive part of your visits – trying on the costumes and having the opportunities to talk to and dance with the dancers. Thank you so much for a wonderful performance and all your kind words and sharing this afternoon with us. Please come again!

D Seregely, Head Teacher, Jack Tizard School

Touring Company dancers and parents:

I love to dance because it makes people happy, as it's enjoyable and it makes other people smile and be happy too. I've learnt that when people haven't seen much dancing before they act the same way even if they were different ages. This has meant a lot to me, not just because it was fun but that it made them feel happy. When I danced with the children it felt really good because it was making them happy which is why I love to dance. It was also nice to dance in a professional dance studio to then perform. The reason why the performing has been my favourite part is because when I do it (which isn't often) it's nice to know the audience really appreciate it. I would love to do this again it was so great.

Sophie

Also, I am so pleased that he had experienced dancing as a service to the audience who otherwise would not be able to enjoy ballet and that he was able to engage with so many different people after the performances. He relished retelling us every evening the events of the day and conversations he had with various residents at care homes or children in the schools. It was a truly unforgettable experience for him.

Saradadevii, Ayan's Mother