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Nicole trained at the Royal Ballet School and Bristol Old Vic Theatre School and was a dancer with the Birmingham Royal Ballet, a professional actor working in all the mainstream mediums and a professional tango dancer. Nicole also worked extensively in the education sector as both a teacher and inspector.

Nicole Tongue now successfully writes, directs and choreographs and her latest choreography, *Jane Eyre* for [London Children's Ballet](#) opens at the Peacock Theatre on 15 May. For more details and how to book please visit [Londondance.com](#) or [Sadlerswells.com](#)



Nicole, you have just choreographed the stage adaptation of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* for London Children's Ballet, which involved auditioning over 600 children from across the country and working with a final cast of 50 young dancers aged 9-15yrs.

What are the challenges working with such a large cast of young performers?

I was recommended to get in touch with London Children's Ballet through two most respected colleagues and this is my first production for the company.

Before rehearsals began I wanted to ensure with such a large cast that the children were dancing as much as possible, maximising their stage time whilst I remained loyal to the novel. The other most noticeable factor when working with large casts especially children is their differing needs and abilities. Over the passing months they are learning the importance of discipline, retaining the material and musical cues and developing a corps de ballet ethic. Usually towards the end of a seven hour session I find myself not only exhausted but gently reminding them that there is only one of me and fifty of them.

Observing rehearsals at the Dance Attic, I was mesmerized by your ability to multitask, organising and rehearsing the excited group of 50 young ballet dancers, working alongside colleagues, musicians and the dramaturge whilst making choreographic decisions instantaneously. You also seamlessly manage and conduct the rehearsal day.

Looking at past choreographic experiences are there particular points in your career that help you now in organising your work load and rehearsal process? What can you draw from today?

As a former actress I've learnt the benefits of researching and studying whether it's been in film, television, theatre or radio. In particular working with the Spontaneity Workshop an improvisation company taught me the art of story telling, building characters, receiving not blocking and trusting your instincts in the moment.

Working in the Opera world for the past couple of years I've learnt the importance of knowing your creative outcome long before you get into the studio. Last year I found myself at the Geneva Opera House with a chorus of forty, I was

required to know everyone's name before we started, choreograph and direct in French and there was no time for resetting. It was a matter of delivering 'one take wonders.'

In the case of working with large numbers, whilst in Philadelphia with a cast of 200 delivering a full length ballet in five weeks, I concluded that the choreographic skill required was merely a fraction of the overall skills needed for the job. The scheduling alone required the ability of an algebraic mathematician trying to assemble daily rehearsals from twenty one different classes into two studios. Only now am I sorry I didn't pay enough attention in my maths classes.

In short what I've gathered to date is the importance of a creative team, in agreement with the end goal, the power of preparation, constant communication and a large dose of patience, courage and appreciation.

The young dancers of *Jane Eyre* will learn a great deal working with you and each other. For some this will be the first professional experience of their young careers. What will you take with you from this production and how does this affect the next one?

I always leave a children's production with an immense sense of awe regarding their achievement. Mainly because I've aimed dangerously high and the children have risen to the challenge. Time is always an issue because you are at the mercy of the children's learning speed. For *Jane Eyre* we only come together once a week on a Sunday so the lack of continuity has been a noticeable challenge. This combined with being a perfectionist has certainly increased the stress levels. However my ballet mistress has



encouraged me keep moving forward, even when it's felt like the bare bones of the ballet are barely there, and sure enough it's now complete and in the process of being cleaned and the cleaning process is slow.

I shall most likely leave this production moved and inspired by the children's personal stories and journeys; but also mindful of realistic outcomes, the need to be in the moment, not driven by time, and the importance of refilling my energy tank.

You have been devising choreography from scripts and novels throughout your choreographic career. What draws you towards transferring language into movement and what are the challenges you may face?

The art of communicating story through dance is something I will forever be drawn to and has evolved organically out of my various careers. I believe that story telling is one of the most effective devices in getting any message across. This isn't to say I don't enjoy art in its purest form or a night of sheer entertainment, in fact I enjoy them equally, but I'm far more likely to remember a story than a lecture, a character than a name and a motive rather than action just for the sake of it.

I delight in collaborating, and in this production I have been lucky enough to work with a talented dramaturge. Together we have created the scenario, story boarded every single scene, chosen the key moments that need accentuating and taken an approach similar to that of a film director. Given this production is targeted towards both children and adults we felt it was important to find a message that is as relevant today as it was in the 1800's.

On a journey of self discovery, a young girl summons up the courage and hope required in moving through the adult world whilst remaining faithful to her beliefs and dreams. In Jane's case she matures into an educated, grounded woman who eventually finds the happiness she believes she is worthy of.

The most obvious challenge has been getting the children to leap up in age, emotional maturity and acting ability. Added to the fact that the two leads have never had a pas de deux lesson and there are three major scenes that require them, the two dancers have propelled themselves forward through such a fast learning curve that I'm sure going back into dance classes at a steadier pace for them could seem somewhat dull.

With narrative comes immediate structure, reason and purpose to a piece, but the flip side is how to communicate dialogue through a dance vocabulary.

I'm forever inspired by those talented choreographers who demonstrate this with apparent ease and fluidity, those

moments expressed so succinctly nothing else would compare. My aim is to continue exploring ways that give clarity to such a genre and honing my own vocabulary.

I see from your CV you've trained at the Royal Ballet School and Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. You were an artist with the Birmingham Royal Ballet, a professional actor working in all the mainstream mediums. You've worked in the education sector as both a teacher and inspector, you were a professional tango dancer and you currently write, direct and choreograph. Looking at your broad and varied range of skills, where are you going next and do you have any short and long term aspirations you want to share?

Over the coming months I shall be working on Handel's Oratorio 'Samson' for Buxton Opera Festival. Immediately after that I leave for New York where I shall be launching the next stage of my career. At this stage it's hard to say what the American adventure will bring, but I am sure it will be new and exciting. I hope it will be filled with diverse and multi faceted projects, requiring the skills I have gathered so far. The more tools I have in the bag the more prepared I am for the job.

Long term the role of a Creative Director springs to mind; overseeing large scale international productions which incorporate all art forms and takes the performers and audience to a higher level. Ambitious yes, but then I've never shied away from an adventurous challenge.



Thank you, Nicole!  
Anja Schall, Dance UK

For more information and contact details please visit [Nicole Tongue/ UK Choreographers Directory](http://www.nicoletongue.com/), <http://www.nicoletongue.com/> or contact Anja at Dance UK on 020 7713 0730 / email [anja@danceuk.org](mailto:anja@danceuk.org)

Listen [here](#) to the Classic FM interview with Nicole Tongue.

*Jane Eyre* runs from the 15th - 18th May, Peacock Theatre, Portugal Street, Holborn WC2. Tickets £14- £50, Tel. 0844 412 4322, online booking [Sadlerswells.com](http://Sadlerswells.com)

Photography, Pedro Ferrer for London Children's Ballet

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