

London Children's Ballet

Here, **Franky Ferrer** records her diary in the lead up to her performances of the title role in London Children's Ballet's new production of *Jane Eyre*



Above, Franky Ferrer in rehearsal for *Jane Eyre* Photograph by Pedro Ferrer.

First audition – November 2007

It was the beginning of the London Children's Ballet (LCB) year again. I was so hoping I'd get into the company this time as it's the last year I'll be eligible (the cut off age for girls is 15) – next year I'll be too old! Walking into the warm up studio I was fairly relaxed and expected an easy, laid back barre with a few jumps in the centre. I was very wrong. It was a seriously tough warm up and one of my feet cramped, but it did what it was meant to – we were nice and warm!

Soon it was time to go into the big studio for the audition itself. As well as the panel, there was someone filming the whole thing. I was in the third row with four other girls and we performed in those groups. Waiting for the results for the recall was quite unnerving. It did, on the other hand, give us all a chance to speak to one another which was a real plus. When my number was called after what felt like hours of nervous waiting I had to check at least three times until I was satisfied it was me. During the recall all I could really do was try to dance with joy (minus the scary grin that tends to appear when I'm nervous) and get the steps right. On the way back from the Dance Attic in Fulham, I ran over everything we had done in my head, constantly thinking I should have done that or this could have been better.

Final audition

Walking back through the doors of the Dance Attic seemed less daunting this time round, as I knew a few of the girls I would be auditioning with and was really excited to see who had got through from the other groups. The final audition proved a lot harder; the exercises were difficult and we also learned some of the "fire" dance from *Jane Eyre* when Thornfield Manor burns to the ground. This wasn't conventional ballet, but quite a free and contemporary feeling, making it a lot more difficult to pick up and then add character. The choreography really impressed me and didn't seem simplified for children. It also looked amazing, with everyone dancing at once! I was a bit happier with how I had danced at this audition.

The letter – December 2007

I'M IN!

Casting December 2007

I was really nervous on casting day, as I had been told to bring pointe shoes. Nicole Tongue, the choreographer, was considering having some of the main characters dance on pointe (a first for LCB!), so I knew I was being considered for a major part. It's way more nerve-wracking when you know there is a lot at stake! It was almost like the auditions again but so friendly and great to meet people you would be seeing every Sunday for the next five months of rehearsals, and lots of old friends from the LCB team, of course. We then started trying out for the parts of *Jane Eyre* and Blanche (Mr Rochester's haughty, spoilt fiancée). This mainly consisted of acting, with little dancing, and it was really interesting to see how everyone interpreted the different roles. Having already read the book I found this easier than I expected and tried to be as like the Jane I imagined as possible. Following this, we tried some pas de deux, which was quite a challenge, but I had understudied last year's pas de deux, in *The Secret Garden*, which I think helped me a lot. For the rest of the casting session I wasn't used much but had a go at the "fire dance" again. I went home happy and couldn't wait for rehearsals to start. No matter what part I got, I knew it would be great fun.

Casting letter

Coming home from school after a depressing P.E. lesson (when I faced the fact that throwing and catching was completely beyond me) my mum practically flew to the door and squealed "Hello, Miss Eyre!" Rather confused at this for a few seconds I finally understood. OH MY GOD! I got the part of Jane. WOW! I was ecstatic (and a little dazed), but for once completely speechless (I never thought that day would come...). I must have been running around the house for at least 20 minutes before collapsing on the floor.





**My first rehearsal and costume fitting
- January 20**

Today was my first *Jane Eyre* rehearsal. It was all quite new and a little scary, but meeting Nicole Tongue was really interesting, and whilst I had my costume fitting I could watch her rehearsing my friend Michaela, as *Blanche*. Aya Murayama, the costume designer, told me my dress would eventually be a forest green and very pretty. At the moment, however, it's creamy white with eight pins sticking out and missing a sleeve! We started rehearsing Jane and Mr Rochester's (danced by Lee Hoy) first meeting. This consists of him falling off his horse in the book, which is pretty much impossible on stage, so instead Lee takes a run up from the wings so he can fly onto the stage and collapse convincingly at my feet. I CANNOT LAUGH. Today I also found out that some of the show will be on pointe. Very scary!

January 27

This week we started rehearsing the part where Jane arrives at Thornfield Manor (Mr Rochester's house), and meets the staff and Adele (to whom Jane is governess). During our break we were able to watch Act I Scene 4, the beginning of the school scene, with my friend, Daisy West, dancing the younger Jane Eyre. This is so cool! The ideas are really creative and different.

Photo shoot - February 2

The LCB publicity shoot is with the well-known dance photographer Peter Teigen, and was crowded with assistants, a hair and make-up team from Greasepaint as well as the costume designer and a big team from LCB - the works! We had a lot of shots to get through, and each position had to look good as well as tell a story.

My dress was green and gorgeous; it didn't restrict any movement. I got my first pictures taken with Lee, surrounded by some people dancing as a fire. It looked so good when the picture was taken because as the dancers were moving it blurred and looked like a real fire. It was a great day, but surprisingly tiring. Holding even the most simple positions, for what seems like hours, is really hard - I was shaking.

February 10

This week we started work on the pas de deux. We began with a pas de deux technique session with LCB ballet mistress, Victoria Collinson, then we worked with Nicole. It is quite difficult, but the choreography is amazing and every movement seamlessly joins the next. It's really different to anything I have done before and so challenging. The down-side is that Lee can now threaten to drop me - oh dear!

February 11

Owww! Now I know what sore muscles are. Everything hurts - back, sides, muscles I never knew I had, plus two big blisters on my toes. All worth it, though, I'm really excited about the pas de deux.

February 24

Today began with my second costume fitting, for the ballroom scene. My new dress is also green (I believe a pattern is appearing with green dresses) and very beautiful, but the puffs on the sleeves are bigger than I expected.

Later, I rehearsed the fight scene with Bethan (who plays *Bertha*, Mr Rochester's insane wife). This was definitely the hardest thing I have come across so far. Nicole introduced us to a technique called 'contact improvisation', which is related to contemporary dance. It was really difficult to get used to. In ballet you hold your core muscles all the time, whereas, to prevent bruises (from rolling around and collapsing onto the floor) you need to relax everything, completely.

March 9

We started early at 10 am and went over the pas de deux, changing most of it (help!). We then got most of the ballroom scene figured out.

March 16

Company photo day! It was so much fun. We started off huddled together in a group staring up at Lucille Briance (LCB founder and artistic director) whilst she stood on the balcony above. The day felt glorious. I reckon the ballet is coming along really well and I loved watching the scenes the rest of the cast have been working on.



March 30

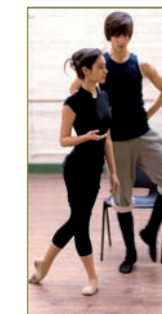
Oh, no! The clocks went forward and I completely forgot, so I was about 45 minutes late. SORRY, Nicole! This morning we finished the fight scene between *Bertha* and Jane. Great fun for us, but from the outside, hopefully it is looking very dramatic and violent! Lee and I then worked with Victoria to see what else we could include in the other pas de deux. The music is really amazing (from the end of the ballet, I suspect), and it was really funny when some of the step combinations didn't work out perfectly, usually ending in some very strange position. We did eventually come out with some material that hopefully looked quite good.

Summing up...

Dancing with London Children's Ballet has been AMAZING for me, and given me some of the best experiences of my life. It feels like a large, extended family! I've been so lucky to be able to be a part of it for three years. I had brilliant fun as a drunk old lady, in *The Canterville Ghost* in 2005, and got to die centre stage, as the Aya in *The Secret Garden* in 2007. Now, to top it all, I've been lucky enough to get the lead, in *Jane Eyre*. I wouldn't swap my times at LCB for anything in the world. The first year I auditioned for *The Little Princess*, and didn't get through. It just goes to prove that you should never give up!



Jane Eyre runs at the Peacock Theatre, London from May 15-18. For ticket availability call the box office on 0870 737 0337.



All pictures, Franky Ferrer, and Lee Hoy in rehearsal for *Jane Eyre* Photographs by Pedro Ferrer.

