Welcome this introduction to ***The Nutcracker*** for ages 5-12 – By Polka Theatre and Little Bulb, directed by Alex Scott.

The audio described performance at Polka Theatre is on Sunday the 15th of December. There’s a touch tour at 1:30pm, the introductory notes will begin at 2:20 and the performance begins at 2:30pm. The performance lasts for approximately 1 hour and twenty minutes including an interval and will be audio described by Miranda Yates.

Polka Theatres’ website tells us – ‘***When squabbling siblings Clara and Fritz receive a mysterious Nutcracker toy from their flamboyant Aunty Drosselmeyer, Clara is certain that she doesn't want her accident-prone younger brother anywhere near it! But with rumours of an evil many-headed Mouse King trying to ruin Christmas in their new family home, Clara might just need the help of Fritz to save the day.’***

Our story is set in present-day Wimbledon and follows the adventures of Clara and Fritz, as they move into a run-down, mouse-infested house with their widowed father. On Christmas Eve, their eccentric Aunty’s gift of a Nutcracker doll, takes them on a quest to confront the Mouse King.

When we arrive in the auditorium the stage is open to us and raised about a metre higher than the seats in the front row. The stage floor is made up of well-worn wooden boards, with the back and sides of the floor a step higher than it is in the front. A glowing light spills out from 6 small lanterns that are spread out along the front edge. Across the back and sides of the stage are long blotchy beige curtains, that look a bit like dust sheets, mottled as though they are a little bit mouldy. The ones at the sides are held back by thick ropes. At the top strings of light bulbs hang down across the space. And a small set of three steps on either side of the stage allows the performers to come down into the audience

The sides of the stage are filled by piles of cardboard boxes of all different sizes, some big enough to contain a person, one tall enough to stand up in. The boxes are used imaginatively to tell the story becoming items of furniture like a tall grandfather clock or when several are used together they form the bonnet and side doors of a car as the performers hold them up around them whilst sitting on imaginary car seats.

We first meet the performers who greet as a snazzy band of musical mice. They wear pale blue jackets and most of them have blue jeans, though one of them wears black trousers with a blue satin stripe down the side. They all have white frilled shirts fastened at the collar by ribbon bows in different shades of blue and each wears a large pair of cardboard mouse ears on a headband and has a long tail that’s a chain of cardboard toilet roll tubes. The band do lots of singing and play lots of instruments including, guitar, xylophone, tambourine and accordion.

As the story begins the mice become the different characters, by adding different items of clothing - first we meet Clara and her brother Fritz. **Clara**, the oldest of the two has brown skin, with her hair pulled back into a ponytail and wears large clear framed glasses. She wears a colourful red and yellow stripy t-shirt with a denim jacket and has a red bum bag clipped around her waist. Clara’s favourite toy is **Princess Roaress** an action figure who has a red superhero outfit and cape and carries a fiery sword.

**Fritz** is tall with pale skin and short light brown hair, he wears a pale t-shirt with a comic strip motif and jeans with trainers and wears his red lumberjack style shirt tied around his waist. Fritz like to give a little swagger in his step, but is a bit clumsy and often stumbles about, his favourite toy is **Fireasaurus** an action figure that’s a cross between a superhero and a dinosaur.

Their dad **Wilhelm** wears a wig of short brown curls and has a thick wonky brown moustache. He wears a yellow sleeveless kitted cardigan over his denim shirt and like the others he wears jeans. Like Clara he also wears large, framed glasses.

**Aunt Drosselmeyer** has light brown skin a thick afro curls, she’s an extrovert dresser and wears a colourful floor length frock, with a pattern of pink, turquoise, yellow and brown flowers. Her hair is piled high and wrapped in a headband and has several scarves draped around her neck. The Nutcracker she brings the children is a joint Christmas present – a carved wooden soldier about 50 centimetres high. The soldier has a painted uniform with a neat blue jacket that has gold buttons and black trousers with a blue stripe up the leg and a golden tall hat. We meet other puppets later on that are similar in style and represent smaller wooden versions of other characters.

On hand to help is The **Sugar Plum Fairy** who wears a pink two piece skirt-suit - a fitted jacket and a snug skirt with red trim on the waistband and lapels. Because the skirt is tight fitting she has to make a dainty side-step when going down any steps. One her feet are a clumpy pair of brown boots, worn with white tights. On her back are a pair of white gauze wings and her hair is covered by a pale pink headscarf, she finishes her outfit with a pink patent leather handbag and carries a long pink wand with a pale pink orb at the end.

The **Mouse King** has pale skin and wears a long furry brown coat with wide lapels that drags on the ground behind as he walks. He wears the coat open revealing his pale vest and underpants. In true regal style the Mouse King has a wide white ruffled collar and perches a tall gold crown over his mousey cardboard ears. Accompanying the Mouse King are more mice, though just their heads – as two of the performers in brown boiler suits scuttle about with one mouse head on each hand ready to do the Mouse King’s bidding.

And finally we briefly meet another mouse relative known as **Elder Mouse**, who wears a long brown wool robe with his shoulders covered by a pale cape which has a hood and mouse ears sticking out on either side. The wise Elder Mouse walks slowly and deliberately with a tall wooden staff in one hand and has a thick white beard and moustache.

**Production Credits.**

**Cast**

**Dominic Conway, Lakeisha Lynch-Stevens, Clare Beresford, Caroline Partridge, Shamira Turner, Understudies - Iain Gibbons and Rose Charmaine Camacho.**

**Creative Team**

The Nutcracker is a coproduction from Polka Theatre and Little Bulb

With Direction by Alex Scott

Set and Costume Design is by Sam Wilde

Lighting Design by Joshua Pharo

Sound Designer is Sharon Tsang

Co-Musical Directors are Clare Beresford and Dominic Conway.

This is the end of the introduction to ***The Nutcracker*** at Polka Theatre. If you have any questions or need further assistance please call the box office on 020 8543 4888