

The Nutcracker – A Tale from the Bayou

BRBT PERFORMERS, ADDITIONAL CAST, DIRECTORS AND PRODUCTION STAFF BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Guest Artists

Lindsey Donnell is an artist with the internationally renowned Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH). A native of Midland, Texas, she trained under Susan Clark and the late Judy Coleman. After attending Butler University where she earned degrees in Dance-Arts Administration and Journalism, she began her professional career with Nashville Ballet. She moved to NYC to join DTH for its celebrated return and inaugural year under Virginia Johnson. With DTH she performed at the White House, in almost all 50 states and in Italy, Honduras, Israel, Turkey, Poland and Brazil. Witnessing the power of art to unite communities led Lindsey to speak at TEDxBroadway 2016 and she was a featured artist at the opening of One World Trade Center. Lindsey's performance highlights include the 2017 and 2022 Kennedy Center Honors, Jacobs Pillow, Veil Dance Festival, and the Kennedy Center's Ballet Across America. She has danced works by George Balanchine, William Forsythe, Nacho Duato, Alvin Ailey, Robert Garland, Geoffrey Holder, Dianne McIntyre, Stanton Welch and Annabelle Lopez-Ochoa.

Elias Re was born in Milan, Italy. He trained at La Scala Ballet School, Sarasota Cuban Ballet School and Escuela Nacional de Ballet de Cuba. His professional experience includes Dance Theatre of Harlem (second season), American Repertory Ballet, New Jersey Ballet, Cleveland Ballet and RP Civic Ballet Training Company. His repertoire includes works by George Balanchine, Jerome Robbins, Christopher Wheeldon, Geoffrey Holder, Stanton Welch, Robert Garland, Claire Davidson, Anna Rita Larghi, Gino Labate, Victor Alexander, and DTH Alumni Da'Von Doane.

Marlon Grigsby began his training with Dancers' Workshop and now teaches and dances in the Houston area with companies including City Ballet of Houston, Juxtapose Dance Arts, Opera in the Heights and Uptown Dance. He returns often to guest with BRBT, recently in *Cinderella* and as the prince in *Rapunzel*. A graduate of LSU, he performed and choreographed for the LSU Dance Ensemble, appeared in *Racine D'or*, and toured in performances to New York City and Boston.

BRBT Performers

Elizabeth Acosta is a sophomore at University High School where she maintains a 4.2 GPA, and is a member of the dance team, Beta Club, Key Club, Student Council and Fellowship of Christian Athletes. She is also a member of National Charity League and The Baton Rouge Cotillion. Lizzie has attended the Nashville Ballet summer program, Central Pennsylvania Youth

Ballet 5-week summer program, and Regional Dance America Choreography intensive on scholarship. She appeared as the Fairy of Love in BRBT's *Cinderella*, Chinese and Clara in the *Nutcracker*.

Kaila Anthony (Trainee) is a Junior Honor student at Baton Rouge Magnet High School. She has been dancing for 13 years. She danced at En Pointe Dance Studio prior to transferring to Dancers' Workshop. Kaila has participated in *The Nutcracker* for the last 3 years. She has toured with the Youth Ballet and participated in multiple summer dance classes with the Dancers' Workshop for the last 2 years. Kaila intends to continue to train and audition to participate in upcoming Summer Intensives.

Gabrielle Bautista has danced with Dancers' Workshop for 8 years and toured with Youth Ballet for 3 years. Gabriela is a freshman honor roll student at University High School with a 4.0 GPA, a member of Student Council and FCA, and speaks fluent Spanish. She placed in the top three in physical science for the 2024 District Rally, and she made it to State Rally. Gabriela's dance training includes her attendance at Sarasota Ballet's 2024 Summer Intensive.

Eliza Bodin has studied at the Dancer's Workshop for 12 years. This is Eliza's first year in the Baton Rouge Ballet Theatre Company, having served as Apprentice last year and as a member of the Youth Ballet for 5 years. She is a graduate of Sacred Heart of Jesus School and currently attends St. Joseph's Academy, where she is an honors student with a 4.3 GPA and is involved in the French Club and the Cooking and Crafts Club. Eliza has attended Summer Intensives at the Nashville Ballet, the Philadelphia Ballet, and most recently, the Miami City Ballet.

Olivia Boudreaux has studied dance for 12 years. She is a sophomore at Baton Rouge Magnet High School with a GPA of 4.0. She has been a member of BETA for 4 years along with various other school clubs. She toured with Youth Ballet for 3 years, attended RDA Southwest Festival in 2023, and competed in YAGP 2024. She also choreographs for Baton Rouge Magnet High School dance performances and has appeared in many performances with BRBT.

Ty'Juan Bovie currently studies dance at the Dancers' Workshop after previous studies at River Ridge Dance School, LSU Dance Department and Legacy Dance. He has danced several roles in BRBT's *Nutcracker*; is now performing in Ballet for Every Body and is employed at Home Depot.

Elliana Chaney has studied dance for 12 years at Dance Center, DeFrances Academy of Dance and Dancers' Workshop. She has toured with BRBT's outreach programs Youth Ballet and Ballet for Every Body. This year, she is performing the role of The Bird with BFEB's *Peter and the Wolf*. She has attended the Vaganova Ballet intensive in Boston, Massachusetts. She is a Junior in high school and attends Berean Co-op. Elliana has also attended and performed at RDA Southwest Festivals. Previous roles in the *Nutcracker* include Clara, Flowers, Chinese and Marzipan.

Kelley Comeaux (Trainee) trains at Dancers' Workshop after beginning his training at age five at Powell Moise where he studied three to four years. He has performed in the last six *Nutcrackers* and for two consecutive years with BRBT's Youth Ballet.

Claire England has trained for 13 years with Dancers' Workshop and attends Baton Rouge Magnet High. She is an AP Honors student with a GPA of 4.5. She is cofounder and president of Baton Rouge High's Children's Care Club. She also has leadership roles in HOSA, book club, dance club, and has over 200 volunteer hours in Key club. She received a full scholarship for the NCI summer program 2023 and won 1st place in the DeBose Arts Competition for her choreography. She has appeared in many BRBT productions, most remarkably Fairy of Hope in *Cinderella*, Marzipan, Clara, and Chinese in *Nutcracker*.

Melanie Epuri has been training in classical ballet since the age of 11. She danced with Hammond Ballet Company and South Mississippi Ballet Theatre. She competed in International Ballet Competition, Youth America Grand Prix and Universal Ballet Competition, where she placed first place in her solo division. She has also danced classical repertoire from *The Nutcracker*, *Paquita*, *Grand Pas Classique*, *Coppelia*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Raymonda*. One of her favorite roles was the role of Sugarplum Fairy in South Mississippi Ballet Theatre's *Nutcracker*. Melanie has trained with various ballet companies across the United States that include American Ballet Theatre, Next Generation Ballet, St. Lucie Ballet, Orlando Ballet, and Elite Classical Coaching. Something she is most passionate about is passing on her wealth of ballet knowledge by coaching young, aspiring ballerinas. When she is not at the studio, she enjoys her time as a wife and mother.

Abigail Foret (Trainee) has been a student at Dancers' Workshop for nine years and has participated in Youth Ballet for four years. This year she is a Baton Rouge Ballet Company Trainee. She is currently an eighth-grade honors student at Sherwood Middle Academic Magnet. In addition to dance, Abigail enjoys singing in her school choir.

Asher France is a student at Baton Rouge Magnet High School and has studied for 7 years at Dancers' Workshop with additional training at Powell-Moise School of Dance and BRBT and Nashville and Baton Rouge Ballet Theater Summer Intensives. He has toured with the Youth Ballet and has participated in Ballet for Every Body. At school, he is an officer for the Cloud-watching Club and Japanese Student Association, and is also a member of the ASL Club and Breakdancing Club.

London Griffin is a passionate dancer with five years of experience in ballet at Dancers' Workshop. She has toured with Youth Ballet and attended Nashville Ballet and Joffrey Ballet summer intensive programs. London is a freshman at St. Joseph's Academy.

Megan Guo has trained for 14 years and is a junior at Baton Rouge Magnet High School. She is an AP Honors student with a GPA of 4.5. She is a co-founder of Children's Care Club and an officer of Chinese Student Association Club. She is also a member of BETA Club, STEM Club,

and HOSA Club. She placed Top 12 at YAGP in the classical category and is also a YAGP solo Finalist. Megan has attended the Houston Ballet and Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet 5-week summer programs and has been accepted with scholarships to Next Generation and Cary Ballet. She choreographs for BRMHS and appeared as the Winter fairy in BRBT's *Cinderella*.

Irelenn Harris (Trainee) has studied at the Dancers' Workshop for 11 years and toured with the Youth Ballet for 4 years. Over the past 8 years, she has participated in numerous Baton Rouge Ballet Theatre productions, including the *Nutcracker*. She is an honor student at Parkview Baptist School where she is a member of the Beta Club, Student Council, and the Jr. Steppers Dance Team.

Kate Harris has studied ballet at Dancers' Workshop for 15 years and has been in BRBT's company for the past four years. Kate has performed in numerous *Nutcracker* performances with BRBT, in addition to spring shows such as *Rapunzel*, *Cinderella*, and *Dimensions in Dance*. Kate is a freshman at LSU, majoring in Applied Coastal Environmental Science. Kate also has a part time job at her church and at a local restaurant. She also attends a college ministry at LSU where she volunteers.

Fiona Heffernan has danced since she was 2 years old. She studied the British Ballet Organization curriculum in New Zealand, Royal Academy of Dance in Australia and has studied at Lake Charles Dance Academy and Baton Rouge Ballet Theatre since being in America. She has competed in many competitions as a child and Youth American Grand Prix at age 16. She is a senior at LSU studying Psychology with a Business Administration minor. She has been Spanish, Marzipan, Dolls, Snow lead, and Azalea. She is currently applying for graduate school to become a psychologist or counselor.

Torrie Hedges has trained at Dancers' Workshop for 7 years. During that time, she performed with Youth Ballet and with the Company in many spring concerts, RDA Festivals and *Nutcrackers*. She has attended summer intensives with Louisville Ballet, Next Generation Ballet, and BRBT. As well as performing in this year's *Nutcracker*, she also works behind the scenes as a Rehearsal Assistant. She currently attends Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University and will be graduating from their physical therapist assistant program this spring. She plans to pursue becoming a physical therapist in the future.

Hadley Jackson (Trainee) has studied dance at Dancers' Workshop for 9 years. Hadley has toured with Youth Ballet for 4 years and has performed in numerous BRBT productions including 6 years of *Nutcracker*. Hadley is an 8th grade honor student at St. George Catholic School with a 4.0 GPA. She is a member of the St. George Dance Team, Student Ambassador, a lector for school masses, and was selected for UDA All-American in the summer of 2024.

Lucy Khemmanyvong (Trainee) has studied ballet for seven years at Dance Center School of Performing Arts, Dancers' Workshop and Rave Performing Arts. She has also studied jazz, contemporary and hip hop at Rave as well as tap at Dance Center and Rave. She performs with the Central Middle School dance team and competed in UDA Nationals in 2022 and 2023. She

performed in the Russian *Nutcracker* for three years as a snowflake, a little Chinese and a little French.

Samantha LeBlanc is a 12th Grade Honor Student at Parkview Baptist School who has attended Nashville Ballet Summer Intensive and performed in many BRBT productions and Youth Ballet Tours. This is her 13th year of training at Dancers' Workshop.

Isabelle Lieux is a senior honor student at St. Joseph's Academy with a 4.7 GPA. Isabelle has 15 years of dance experience. Growing up as a devoted Dancers' Workshop student and Youth Ballet performer, she has rigorously worked her way up the ranks to demi-soloist roles with the Company. She has attended and performed at RDA Southwest Festivals and many Spring Concerts and *Nutcrackers*. Isabelle was the student co-chair for the Clara's Closet program this year. At St. Joseph's Academy, she is a Student Ambassador, Key Club Treasurer, and Commended National Merit Scholar.

Rachel Magee (Trainee) is a student at Baton Rouge Magnet High School where she has a 4.0 GPA. She is a member of The Dance Club, ASL Club, and Children's Care Club. Rachel has trained at Dancers' Workshop for 4 years, and has toured with the Youth Ballet program. Previous roles include Bon Bon and Clara. She is also part of the Ballet for Every Body dance education program and performs the role of The Duck in *Peter and the Wolf*.

Juliana Martin is a sophomore at University High School where she has a GPA of 4.1. She is a member of the dance team, Key Club, Student Council and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. She has danced with Dancers' Workshop for 12 years and has been in the *Nutcracker* for 9 years. She has also been in other performances including *Rapunzel*, *Coppelia*, *Cinderella* and *Paquita*.

Sophia Robison (Apprentice) is a student at Baton Rouge Magnet High School, and is a member of the ASL Club, Dance Club, and Key Club. She has been training at The Dancers' Workshop since 2019 and is a member of the Youth Ballet. This summer, she attended the Sarasota Ballet Summer Intensive. She has also attended the RDA Festival in Midland and performed the role of Clara in 2023.

Victoria Sharp has been a student of Dancers' Workshop since she was five years old. She is honored to have been a part of the BRBT Youth Ballet and *Nutcracker* performances for many years. She has performed the roles of: page, lamb, party girl, mouse, bon-bon, Clara and most recently Angel, Snow and Flower. She has been a proud BRBT Company member for the past three years and Co-Chair for Clara's closet this *Nutcracker* season. She has also studied at the Phyllis Guy Dance Center since age two, and continues to study, compete and perform there. She has also attended Nashville Ballet and CBT Vaganova Ballet summer intensives. Victoria attends Walker High where she is part of both Talented Theater and Talented Music programs. She is an active member of her school's FCA as well as her Church Choir. She is a volunteer choreographer and cantor for her church.

Elizabeth Talbot has a chemical engineering degree from Louisiana Tech University and is now working as a production engineer with BASF. She began dancing at the age of three and continued with BRBT through high school and with Twin City Ballet in Monroe during college. She appeared last year as the Spring Fairy in *Cinderella* and has performed in many *Nutcrackers*. Elizabeth also volunteers at her church.

Allison Welch has trained for 10 years with Dancers' Workshop. She has toured with Ballet for Every Body and Youth Ballet and appeared in numerous season productions. She is in the 11th grade at Sequitur Classical Academy. She has attended the Vaganova Ballet Intensive in Boston, Massachusetts.

Berklee Zanders has trained with Dancers' Workshop for 8 years and has been a member of Youth Ballet since 2020. In addition, she attended New Orleans Ballet Theatre's summer intensive in 2023. Berklee is a freshman at Baton Rouge Magnet High School with a 4.0+ GPA. An AP and honors student, she also participates in several clubs, including the Beta Club and the Computer Science Honor Society. Beyond dance and school, Berklee is classically trained in piano, placing in the top 3 in the state competition since she was 7 years old.

Claras

Sara Jane Booty is a 7th grader at Prairieville Middle School. A former 5th grade Student of the Year, Sara is a flutist in PVM's concert band, a Junior Beta & 4-H member, currently serving as Youth Legislature Speaker of the House. She is a touring member of the Youth Ballet and has performed in BRBT's *Rapunzel* and *Cinderella* while maintaining a 4.0 GPA. This will be her 5th year performing in *The Nutcracker*, *A Tale from the Bayou* and her 9th year training at Dancers' Workshop.

Aisleigh Dufrene is a freshman at St. Joseph's Academy and has been training for four years at The Dancers' Workshop. She has appeared in three previous *Nutcrackers* in the roles of Party Girl, Cook, and Bon Bon. She has been a member of the Youth Ballet for two years. Aisleigh enjoys volunteering, babysitting and spending time with friends and family.

Mary Harper Hart has been dancing for 9 years. This is her 3rd year with Dancers' Workshop. She is a 7th grader at University High School, where she serves as a class representative and dances with the Junior Spirit Steppers. She is also a member of the National Charity League and enjoys volunteering and spending time with friends and family. She has performed in three *Nutcracker* productions, and toured with Youth Ballet for two summers.

Additional Cast

Brian Andrews studied ballet and modern dance at Giacobbe Academy of Dance in New Orleans and has returned to the stage after a 50-year break. He is the Hermann Moyse, JR/ Louisiana Bankers Association Instructor in Banking at LSU's E. J. Ourso College of Business

and serves as the Executive Director of Real Estate Research Institute. He is a performing musician of over 3 decades, currently playing lead guitar with The V-Tones.

Leonard Augustus, Jr. was our first Nutcracker and Arabian Prince in this production and later expanded his roles to Party Parent, Mr. Stahlbaum, and now Uncle Drosselmeyer. He uses dance as a means to bring communities together through social events, benefits, community art initiatives and liturgical ministries. You will find Leonard enjoying his retirement from a career in civil service through his world travels. He also is a member of BRBT's Ballet for Every Body and tours as the Wolf in *Peter and the Wolf* to area schools.

Timothy Callais is returning to the party scene for a sixth year, and in his second as Mr. Stahlbaum. He holds an MFA in Acting from University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (2016), a BS in Theatre Performance and Directing from Northwestern State University (2013), and a certificate in the formal training of long-form improvisation from iO Chicago (2010). Celebrating almost 25 years on stage, this father of triplet daughters has received several local awards for his stage-work, including: "Best Actor in a Musical" as Leo Bloom in *The Producers*, "Best Supporting Actor in a Musical" as Lumiere in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, and most recently the "Chester Award" as Franklin Hart, Jr. in *9 to 5, the Musical* at Ascension Community Theatre, where Timothy will be directing *Miracle of 34th Street* next holiday season (but don't worry - he'll still be cracking nuts, too)! Off the stage, Timothy is a playwright, a director, and an arts educator known to his students as Mister C. Currently in his 5th full year in the classroom, Mister C is a drama teacher at Baton Rouge Center for Visual and Performing Arts. Most recently, Timothy became the new Education and Community Outreach Manager for Opera Louisiana.

Ashley Cox trained at the Dancers' Workshop and was a 6-year member of the BRBT Youth Ballet. As a BRBT company member, she danced the roles of Angel and Snow, and attended RDA Southwest Festivals. After a few summer stints as a zipline guide in the Smoky Mountains and the Northwoods of Wisconsin, she is now the Children's Library Technician at Jones Creek Library. She holds a BA in creative writing from LSU, and is currently pursuing a graduate degree in library science from LSU. In her free time, she is involved in church life and is an active Latin dancer.

Elise Farris is a former BRBT company member who trained at The Dancers' Workshop and Mobile Ballet. She has appeared in numerous BRBT *Nutcrackers*, spring concerts, youth ballets, and RDA Southwest festivals. After graduating from LSU Health Sciences Center New Orleans with an MPH in Epidemiology, she now works as a researcher in the Physical Activity and Obesity Epidemiology Lab at Pennington Biomedical. In 2022, she received the Chancellor's Award from the LSU Health Sciences Center School of Public Health. She also attended Spring Hill College in Mobile, AL and graduated with a BS in Health Science and a minor in Psychology. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her family and friends, traveling, tutoring students in math, and volunteering with her church.

T-Bob Hebert is a former LSU football standout turned radio, YouTube and podcast personality who hosts Off the Bench, SNAPS and Rivals Down South. Married and a father of three, he has always dreamed of being in *The Nutcracker*. This is T-Bob's second appearance as a Party Parent.

Brandy Johnson a native of Baton Rouge, is a graduate of Baton Rouge Magnet High School. Brandy earned a Bachelor of Music Education from Loyola University New Orleans and a Master of Music from University of Kentucky. After completing graduate school, Brandy began a career as an opera singer, singing with companies such as Washington National Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Glimmerglass Festival, Chicago Opera Theatre, and La Scala in Milan. Brandy participated in the Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program with Washington National Opera, where she made her debut as Mercedes in Bizet's *Carmen*. Other roles include Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*), Rosina (*il barbiere di Siviglia*), Suzuki (*Madam Butterfly*), and Carmen (*Carmen*). Brandy traveled to Oman to perform with Placido Domingo in a concert to open the Royal Opera House of Muscat. After returning to Baton Rouge, Brandy began a career and continues to work as a music educator with the East Baton Rouge Parish School System. She is currently a Talented Music Teacher at McKinley Middle Magnet and McKinley High School. Brandy made her directing debut with Playmakers Theatre of Baton Rouge with the musical *Annie Jr.* She also music directed *Xanadu Jr* with Independence Park Theatre and *Frozen Jr* and *Aladdin Jr.* with McKinley Middle Magnet. Brandy is an active performer with Theatre Baton Rouge, Playmakers Theatre of Baton Rouge, and the Manship Theatre. In December, Brandy performed in the holiday performance Simply Having a Wonderful Christmas Time with Mike Esnault at the Manship Theatre and was a feature performer with Louisiana Arts and Science Museum's Mighty Voices cabaret performance. Brandy was the music director for *Aladdin Kids* and *Willy Wonka Jr* with Manship Theatre, *Matilda Jr*, *The Grinch*, *Space Pirates*, and *Newsies* with Independence Park Theatre. Brandy recently directed *Alice in Wonderland* (Theatre Baton Rouge) and *The Little Mermaid Jr* (Playmakers of Baton Rouge). Recently, Brandy was chosen as East Baton Rouge Parish Fine Arts Middle School Teacher of the Year in 2024. Brandy is currently music directing *Mean Girls* with Independence Park Theatre.

Jenny Heroman Koenig studied voice with Ninfa Caruso and dance with Tari's School of Dance for most of her life and her theatrical credits include several local productions for the BRBT, Playmakers, ACT, TBR, the Cabaret Theatre, and Episcopal Theatre. Jenny has a B.A. in Mass Communication from LSU and worked in the TV industry for 12 years, but recently became a certified teacher through the Teach Ascension Academy. She's now teaching religion in the Lower School at Episcopal. She also sang with the Something Blue Band for 10 years.

Dianne Lindsay has loved *The Nutcracker* since she played a non-dancing Clara in the fifth grade in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. In the many years since then, she has prepared for the role of Grandma as the mother of four and the grandmother of nine. Retired from a career in college publishing, she is a member of the BRBT Board of Trustees. An original member of Molly Buchmann's Wednesday morning adult ballet class, she is the oldest member of the cast. This is her seventh appearance in the role.

Mary Beth Maddox is an instructor at the Dancers' Workshop and a physician assistant at Baton Rouge Orthopedic Clinic. She holds a Bachelor of Science Degrees in Biological Sciences and Kinesiology from LSU and a Master of Health Science Degree from University of South Alabama. In addition to her training at Dancers' Workshop, she has studied at International Ballet Competition and NOCCA summer intensive. A former BRBT Company member, Mary Beth has performed in multiple Spring Concerts, *Nutcrackers* and RDA Festivals.

Elizabeth Mathews has been a part of Baton Rouge Ballet Theatre's *Nutcracker* since 1988 where she has performed the roles of party girl, Clara, Snow, Flowers, Chinese, Doll, Party Parent, Mrs. Stahlbaum, and Mother Ginger. She has a B.A. Theatre and M.S. Leadership and Workforce Development from Louisiana State University. Elizabeth studied exclusively at the Dancers' Workshop and was a soloist with the Baton Rouge Ballet Theatre. She has performed locally with Theatre Baton Rouge, Swine Palace, LSU Theatre, Playmakers, Red Magnolia, and LSU theatre. Her roles include Laurey, *Oklahoma*; Cinderella, *Into the Woods*; Cinderella, *Cinderella*; M'Lynn, *Steel Magnolias*. She worked on Broadway and across the country with many shows including *Beauty and the Beast*, *Chicago*, *Curtains*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, *Carousel*, *Steel Magnolias*, and *Shrek the Musical*. She has performed, choreographed, and done wigs/make-up around the country. She is a classically trained singer, pianist, and violinist. Elizabeth currently teaches Talented Theatre at Baton Rouge Magnet High School and ballet at Dancers' Workshop.

Bristol Mayo, from Waco, Texas, is a dedicated professional, family man, and adventurer at heart. After attending Prairie View A&M University, Bristol built a distinguished career in supply chain logistics, marked by his exceptional service in the Texas Army National Guard and four years working for the Department of Defense in the Middle East. This unique experience honed his expertise in managing complex global operations and navigating logistical challenges with precision and efficiency. Currently, he serves as a buyer for an international retail manufacturer, where he leverages his strategic insight and global perspective to streamline operations and drive results. His career has afforded him the opportunity to travel the world, an experience that has deepened his appreciation for diverse cultures and global connectivity.

Bristol's greatest joy, however, comes from his family. He is devoted to his wife, Rachel Mayo, and their two children, Britton and Bristol II. Together, they share a love for baseball, family adventures, and creating cherished memories. Bristol is also passionate about the arts and this year marks his second time performing in *The Nutcracker*.

Warren Mertz is a native Texan and is appearing in his first *Nutcracker*. Originally from Katy, Texas, he obtained a Bachelor's in Finance and Accounting from Texas A&M. While working in Texas he met his wife, who he won over with private dance lessons on their third date. Following completion of her training they moved to Baton Rouge in 2023. He works in accounting at Progress Residential and is pursuing a master's in theology at Franciscan University of Steubenville. A former wrestler and football player, he enjoys working out and running and has completed more than 20 half marathons as well as several full marathons. He is an active

member of St. George Catholic Church and spends his time volunteering with St. Vincent de Paul, the Prison Parole Project, and Kolbe Prison Ministries.

Renee Molley has studied for six years at Dancers' Workshop and is CEO of the family business in Gonzales, LA which includes Hero's Journey Academy, Hero's After School and Summer Camp, and Hero's Martial Arts. She attended University of Washington and Acton Academy extended education. Renee is a cast member of BRBT's Ballet for Every Body and tours area schools in the *Peter and the Wolf* production.

Jakiaya Norman has studied ballet for four years with Dancers' Workshop and toured with BRBT's Ballet for Every Body. She is an LPN who attended Baton Rouge Community College. This is Jakiaya's 4th *Nutcracker* performing as a Soldier and Party Guest. After working 3 years locally for Petite Princess as a princess character, she has been invited to become a Disney cast member and you will find her in the spring of 2025 performing at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida.

Sarah Perkins is an attorney at Breazeale, Sachse & Wilson, L. L. P., with both bachelor's and law degrees from LSU. A former BRBT Company member, she has performed with our Youth Ballet and in this production as a Party Girl, Bonbon, Angel, Soldier, Snowflake and Party Mom. Sarah also serves as a BRBT Board Member.

Jennifer Perone MD MS is a board-certified surgical oncologist at Ochsner- MD Anderson Cancer Center in Baton Rouge. She received her B.A. in Psychology and Theology from Boston College and her medical degree from Ohio State University. She then completed her general surgery residency and a master's in clinical sciences at UTMB in Galveston, TX, followed by a fellowship in surgical oncology at Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, FL. She and her husband, Warren Mertz, returned home to Baton Rouge in 2023. She trained at Dancers' Workshop and has performed in the *Nutcracker* as a Soldier and Angel as well as other BRBT Junior company productions, most notably as one of the wicked stepsisters in *Cinderella*. She serves on the BRBT Board and is proud to be one of this year's tastemakers for the American Cancer Society's Fork Cancer fundraiser.

Francesco Pinque is a Theology Teacher at St. Joseph's Academy with a bachelor's in philosophy and communication arts from Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio. His stage experience includes performing as a Villager in *Beauty and the Beast* during college. This is Francesco's premiere performance with BRBT as the Butler.

Jourdan Puyau is a professionally licensed engineer in Louisiana, practicing Naval Architecture & Marine Engineering. He creates and oversees the design & analysis of both commercial and government shipbuilding projects across the gulf coast. He holds two bachelors from LSU and UNO, and currently serves as the Chair for the Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers (SNAME) Gulf Section. Jourdan is making his 14th appearance in the *Nutcracker* after a decade-long absence. He first began dancing with the BRBT in 1999, when he played a party boy. A few

years later, he was cast as Fritz, then the Chef, and in 2005 he began a long tenure as the Butler. While playing the butler, he also performed smaller roles throughout the production including Angel Couple. Watching his father perform as the Grandpa and sister as a Party Mom the last several years gave him a strong sense of nostalgia, ultimately leading to his return in 2024. To Jourdan, as well as many others involved in this production-- the holiday season just isn't complete without the BRBT *Nutcracker*.

Michael Puyau is returning to BRBT for the fourth time as the Grandpere! He is a board-certified General Surgeon who retired after 30 years practice in Baton Rouge. He and his family have a long history with BRBT, both on stage and off. While his stage experience has been limited, he spends most *Nutcracker* weekends dressed as a toy soldier, assisting patrons and guarding the stage door. Outside of that, there is always yardwork to be done and traveling. Earlier this year, he and his wife, Susan, sailed around the world! Michael is especially excited this year to be sharing the stage with his children, Renée Stelzer and Jourdan Puyau, who are performing as Party Parents.

Tonja Rainey's love for dance began at a young age and grew as she studied dance through college. She holds a bachelor's degree from University of Southwestern Louisiana (ULL) (1994) with an emphasis in education and dance performance. In 2013, she and her husband, David, founded Christian Youth Theater Baton Rouge where she serves as the Artistic Director. Her happy place is directing and choreographing musicals. Some of her recent favorites have been *High School Musical* (director), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (director), *Finding Nemo, Jr* (Choreographer) and *Mary Poppins* (Asst. Director). Tonja is happy to be part of the BRBT community where two of her daughters were students at Dancers' Workshop and performed in the *Nutcracker* in several roles. This is her debut performance in BRBT's *Nutcracker*.

Renée Stelzer is a Registered Dietitian and Director of the Metabolic Kitchen at Pennington Biomedical Research Center. She has been part of the BRBT family since 1993, when she first danced the role of lamb in *The Nutcracker-A Tale from the Bayou*. Since then, she has held many other roles in *Nutcracker* and other BRBT productions alike, and has also served on BRBT's Board of Trustees. Renée is a BRBT alum, and a graduate of the University of Alabama.

Wayne Talbot, a Party Dad since 2013, is a two-time award-winning Star Dancer for Big Buddy and a retired educator. He holds three education degrees from USL and LSU. Wayne P Talbot is the retired East Baton Rouge Parish School System's Director of Fine Arts and an LSU Christ the King Music Minister. He continues to perform the role of the "Military Party Dad", which he began in 2013, and is honored to be dancing with his niece and godchild on her birthday. Wayne was born and educated in Thibodaux, LA. He became a student of the Arts at an early age. Once graduating from high school, he completed his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Southwestern LA., now known as ULL. He began his teaching career at his high school alma mater and then moved to Baton Rouge in 1981 to begin his graduate studies and teach in the East Baton Rouge Public School System. He earned a Master's in Education degree and an Educational Specialist degree in 1982 and 1984, respectively. During his 40-year career in

education, he served as a classroom teacher, a school level administrator, and a district-level supervisor for the Arts. He is an accomplished art educator, visual artist, musician, and dancer. He has always lived with a passion for the Arts and hopes to have several more years of performing in the *Nutcracker*.

Van Vo is an LSU graduate with a degree in Mechanical Engineering who turned his focus toward gaming and the arts. After teaching ballroom dance through college, he became a full-time Ballroom Dance Instructor. In 2017, he took over local game store, Little Wars, and now manages the store and organizes local gaming communities while still teaching ballroom dance part time. He has and continues to volunteer his time for several local dance charities like Dancing for Big Buddy, Dancing for a Cause, the Golden Guys, and more. This is Van's premiere performance as a Party Parent.

Claire White attended Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School from kindergarten through high school and graduated with honors. She then went to Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady University where she received a bachelor's in business and minor in theology. While there, she was awarded the AUPHA award in recognition of her academic achievements. Claire currently works as a bookkeeper and volunteers at her home parish of St. Agnes Catholic Church in various committees. In her free time, Claire enjoys walking her dog, reading, gardening, baking, and spending time with her family and friends. A former Youth Ballet and Company member, Claire has appeared in multiple productions including her favorites: *The Nutcracker - A Tale from the Bayou*, *Cinderella*, and *Rapunzel*. Some of Claire's favorite memories are the ones where she is dancing on stage with her two younger sisters.

Directors and Production Staff

Rebecca Mathews Acosta (Artistic Director) is director of dance at Baton Rouge Magnet High School where she also choreographs for the theater department and orchestra productions. She is the director of the BRBT Youth Ballet and teaches intermediate and advanced ballet at The Dancers' Workshop. An LSU graduate, she also earned a nursing degree from our Lady of the Lake College. She has appeared in numerous principal roles with BRBT including Azalea Fairy in *The Nutcracker*, the Fairy Godmother in *Cinderella*, the Lilac Fairy in *Sleeping Beauty*, Myrtha in *Giselle*, the Mother in "Family Secrets" and Mother in "Women of Acts". Rebecca studied on full scholarship at the Joffrey Ballet, New York, and on scholarship with the Eglevsky Ballet, where she appeared as a demi-soloist in *Swan Lake* and a soloist in *Paquita*. She also appeared in several LSU opera and theater productions and in *West Side Story* with Theatre Baton Rouge. As an ABT Certified Teacher, she successfully completed the ABT Teacher Training Institute in Primary through Level 7 and Partnering of the ABT National Training Curriculum with ABT New York. She is the 2017 LAAHPERD Dance Teacher of the Year and southern district Dance Teacher of the Year.

Jonna Cox (Artistic Director) began her ballet training in her hometown of Corpus Christi, Texas, under Larry and Bettye Roquemore and later with Christina Munro. She holds a BFA in

Ballet from Texas Christian University where she was a Nordan Fine Arts Scholarship recipient. She also spent summers as a student at Summer Dance Intensives with Houston Ballet, Boston Ballet (on scholarship), and NYU. She danced professionally with the Dayton Ballet under the direction of James Clouser and enjoyed performing lead roles in *Pas de Quatre*, *Swan Lake*, and Clouser's *Carmina Burana* and *Surprise Symphony*. After moving to Baton Rouge in 1996, she joined BRBT and proved herself a proficient dancer in both the classical and contemporary styles of dance. She has performed various works by Molly Buchmann, Susan Perlis, and Edgar Anido. She has danced the roles of Spanish and Azalea Fairy in BRBT's *Nutcracker*, and the Sylph Queen in Winthrop Corrie's *Snow White*. A teacher at the Dancers' Workshop, Jonna was awarded a scholarship to attend the Regional Dance America Craft of Choreography Conference as an Emerging Choreographer for her piece *Butterflies*. Since then, she has choreographed works for BRBT that include *Obrigado Brasil*, *Solstice*, and *Red Hill*. Jonna choreographs for BR's Christian Youth Theatre (CYT) where she choreographed *The Legend of Pocahontas*, *Rapunzel*, *Mary Poppins*, and was both director and choreographer for *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

Christine Perkins (Associate Artistic Director) began her dance career in New Orleans, studying with Joseph Giacobbe, Ceyhun Ozsoy, and Mary Munro and later moving to the stage with Delta Festival Ballet. While receiving her master's degree in Speech-Language Pathology, she taught and performed in Shreveport with Louisiana Dance Theatre, performing lead roles in pieces by Dianne Maroney and others. After moving to Baton Rouge, Christine soon joined BRBT where she performed numerous roles in *The Nutcracker* and pas de deux roles in both *Les Sylphides* and *Sleeping Beauty's* Bluebird. She is now an Associate Director creating and directing its newest community engagement, Ballet for Every Body.

Patrick Acampora (Snowmeister/Master Rigger) retired after 30 years as associate professor of Theatre Technology at LSU where he worked on over 300 productions while also working in numerous capacities at venues throughout the area. He has been a theatre technical technician/designer for almost 40 years and has worked professionally as master rigger, technical director, lighting designer, stagehand and theatre consultant. He has earned degrees in Theatre Technology from Florida Atlantic University and Purdue University, and holds an engineering degree from the New Jersey Institute of Technology. He is also an experienced moving light repair technician and has attended seminars on projection technology and design.

Nels Anderson (Set Director) trained in Chicago at Northwestern University and the Goodman School of Drama, a school of the Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. Anderson retired from LSU after 45 years of university teaching. At the time of his retirement, he was a Full Professor and the Kinney Professor of Theatre. During his 25-year tenure at LSU, he designed over 130 productions for LSU Theatre and LSU's Professional Theatre Company, Swine Palace. Professor Anderson's professional credits include 40 productions for various Chicago theatres, 34 productions for Philadelphia's Bristol Riverside Theatre, and 14 productions for the Singapore Repertory Theatre in Singapore.

Adriane Bennett (Production Stage Manager) has been working in theatre/film industry since 1995. Graduate of LSU and MFA from UNC School of the Arts, she has worked all over the

country, working in theatre, film/tv, and dance communities. She is an IATSE Local 540 and 478 member, and currently works as the Training Coordinator for Local 478 (Studio Mechanics) and Field Representative for Local 798 (Hair & Make-Up Artists). When she isn't working to make the Behind the Scenes community better, she is working with the non-profit, Krewe de Pink, raising money for Breast Cancer Research. Her first time working the show was in 2000 as the Sound Board Operator. Since moving back to Louisiana, she has been Prop Master and now Production Stage Manager.

Louis Gagliano (Lighting Designer) is the technical director of the Visual and Performing Arts Center at Episcopal School. He has designed the lighting for numerous LSU, Swine Palace and Playmakers productions. He has worked at many professional theatres, including The Auditorium Theatre in Chicago, Bay Street Theatre in Sag Harbor, New York; Theatre Memphis; and the Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre in North Carolina.

Lee Romaine, (Mechanical Mouse Creator) an Emmy-Award winner, is a Creative Producer and the Founder/CEO of Romaine Studios, Inc., a distinguished name in the entertainment industry, known as one of Disney Imagineering and Universal Creative's greatest secret weapons. RSI originated as a boutique creature and character company, providing make-up, puppets and special effects for movies, TV and commercials. Romaine won an Emmy in 2002 for the Prosthetic Design in HBO's *Six Feet Under*. Other live-action creatures and characters, props, and digital work in films include Elton John's *Red Piano Tour*, Steven Spielberg's *War of The Worlds*, *What Just Happened*, *Cats and Dogs: The Revenge of Kitty Galore*, Stephen King's *Nightmares and Dreamscapes*, *Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole*, *The Rebound*, *The Dictator*, and other award-winning shorts and commercials.