

The Nutcracker – A Tale from the Bayou

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

GUEST ARTISTS

Emelia Perkins began her training at The Dancers' Workshop when she was only four-years-old. Later, as a company member of BRBT, she performed many roles in *The Nutcracker* as well as works of choreography by many local and guest artists, inspiring her to become a professional ballet dancer. She left Baton Rouge to pursue more intensive training with Houston Ballet Academy, where she spent the last two years of her dance education. Upon graduating at the highest level of their academy, Emelia joined Kansas City Ballet as a trainee in their second company.

In 2018, Emelia joined the studio company of Sarasota Ballet and was later promoted through the ranks to Corphée. With Sarasota Ballet, Emelia performed works with choreography by Sir Frederick Ashton, George Balanchine, Mark Morris, Twyla Tharp, Sir Peter Wright and Martha Graham, Paul Taylor, and Dominic Walsh.

This season, Emelia moved to the Denver area to work as a freelance artist, securing contracts with several organizations. This freedom has finally allowed her to return home to perform with Baton Rouge Ballet Theatre in leading roles for two full-length ballets; as Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker - A Tale from the Bayou* and in the titular role of *Rapunzel* in the spring of 2026.

Sanford Placide was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Sanford Placide and grew up in Gonaïves, where he began learning Afro- Caribbean and folkloric dance at 11. After emigrating to the U.S., he trained with Ballet Etudes of South Florida, Francois Perron at Manhattan Youth Ballet, the French Academie of Ballet in NYC, and privately with Nadege Hottier. He also attended prestigious summer intensives across the country.

Placide's professional career spans six seasons with Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH), following engagements with Alberta Ballet, Ballet West 2, and North Carolina Dance Theatre 2 (now Charlotte Ballet). He has performed as a guest artist with multiple companies including Ballet Etudes of South Florida, Voorhees Ballet, and Collage Dance Collective.

His repertoire includes works by George Balanchine, William Forsythe, Nacho Duato, Stanton Welch, Glenn Tetley, Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, Wen Wei Wang, Robert Garland, Mark Diamond, Desmond Richardson, Yukicchi Hattori, Aszure Barton, Tiffany Rae Fischer, and Claudia Schreier.

With his dynamic artistry and technical precision, Placide continues to captivate audiences worldwide, contributing to the evolution and enrichment of the dance world.

Devin Jordan is a junior at UL-Lafayette majoring in Performing Arts with a connection in Dance. He is a TOPS and Live Oak Scholarship recipient as well as a member of Chi Tau Epsilon. He studied and completed at Dance Graphics and currently teaches there. Most recently, Devin performed in *Ten Tiny Dances*© and ULL Spring and Fall dance productions .

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

Company Bios 2025-26

Elizabeth Acosta is a junior at University Lab School where she maintains a 4.6 GPA and is a member of the Dance Team, National Honor Society, Beta Club, Key Club, Student Council executive board, Cooking Club President and Fellowship of Christian Athletes. 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 in BRBT's *Alice in Wonderland*, *Rapunzel*, as the Fairy of Love in *Cinderella*, and Arabian, Chinese, Flower, Snow, and Clara in *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou*.

Kaila Anthony is a senior honor student at Baton Rouge Magnet High School. She has been dancing for 14 years. She danced at En Pointe Dance Studio prior to transferring to The Dancers' Workshop. Kaila has participated in BRBT's *The Nutcracker* for the last three years and toured with the Youth Ballet. Kaila is a member of Top Teens of America and a Debutante for Delta Sigma Theta.

Gabrielle Bautista has trained with The Dancers' Workshop for eight years and toured with BRBT's Youth Ballet for three years. She is a sophomore honor student at University Lab School with a 4.0 GPA. A member of Student Council, First Tuesday, Club Med, and Fellowship of Christian Athletes, she speaks fluent Spanish and placed in the top three in physical science for the 2024 District Rally. Gabrielle's dance training includes her attendance at Sarasota Ballet's 2024 summer intensive program.

Eliza Bodin has studied at The Dancers' Workshop for 13 years and toured for five years with BRBT's Youth Ballet. Eliza has performed all children's roles, Clara, Snow, Flower, and Chinese in BRBT's *The Nutcracker*. An honor student at St. Joseph's Academy, she maintains a 4.4 GPA and is involved in the French Club, Beta Club, and Women's Empowerment Club. Eliza has attended summer intensives at the Nashville Ballet, the Philadelphia Ballet, the Miami City Ballet, and most recently, Ballet West in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Sara Jane Booty (Trainee) is in 8th grade at Prairieville Middle School (PVM) where she is a member of Beta Club and a PVM cheerleader. She is in the Youth Legislature Hall of Fame, and she received the Youth Legislature Ripple Award. Sara has been dancing for 10 years at The Dancers' Workshop, and she was a member of BRBT's Youth ballet for four years.

Elliana Chaney has studied dance for 12 years at Dance Center, Defrances Academy of Dance, and The Dancers' Workshop. She has toured with BRBT's Youth Ballet and Ballet for Every Body outreach programs. She has attended the Vaganova Ballet intensive in Boston, Massachusetts. She is a Senior in high school and attends Berean Homeschool Co-op. Elliana has also attended and performed at Regional Dance America Southwest Festivals. Previous roles in BRBT's *The Nutcracker* include Clara, Flowers, Chinese, Marzipan, and Spanish.

Kelley Comeaux (Apprentice) began his training at Powell Moise before transferring to The Dancers' Workshop. A freshman at Baton Rouge Magnet High School, Kelley is a member of the Dance Club and maintains a 3.88 GPA. He has performed for three consecutive years with BRBT's Youth Ballet. He has also danced in BRBT's *The Nutcracker* for seven years, as well as *Rapunzel*, *Cinderella*, and *Alice in Wonderland*.

Aisleigh Dufrene (Apprentice) is a sophomore at St. Joseph's Academy. She has trained at The Dancers' Workshop for five years and performed with BRBT's Youth Ballet. Aisleigh has performed in BRBT's *The Nutcracker* for four years, including one year as Clara, and most recently in *Alice in Wonderland*.

Claire England has trained for 14 years with The Dancers' Workshop. A senior at Baton Rouge Magnet High School (BRMHS), she is a Distinct AP Scholar student with a GPA of 4.5. She is an AP Capstone Diploma Recipient, co-founder and President of BRMHS's Children's Care Club, President of Dance Club, and a member of the Interact Club and Key Club. She attended the National Choreography Intensive on full scholarship and the Cosmopolitan Ballet Theatre in Boston. In April, Claire's piece, *Reverie*, was chosen and performed at the Regional Dance America Southwest Festival. Claire has appeared in many BRBT productions, most remarkably as the Fairy of Hope in *Cinderella*, the Mad Hatter in *Alice in Wonderland*, and Marzipan, Doll, Clara, and Chinese in *The Nutcracker*.

Abigail Foret (Apprentice) has been a student at The Dancers' Workshop for nine years and has participated in BRBT's Youth Ballet for four years. She is currently a freshman honors student at Baton Rouge Magnet High School. Abigail attended Next Generation Dance's summer program and Regional Dance America Festival.

Asher France is a senior at Baton Rouge Magnet High School and has studied for eight years at The Dancers' Workshop. He received training at Nashville Ballet's summer intensive program for the past two summers. Asher has toured with BRBT's Youth Ballet and Ballet for Every Body. At school, he is an officer for the Cloud Watching Club, Japanese Student Association, ASL Club, and a member of Dance Club.

London Griffin is a passionate dancer with six years of experience in ballet at The Dancers' Workshop. She has toured with BRBT's Youth Ballet and attended Nashville Ballet, Joffrey Ballet, and Atlanta Ballet's summer intensive programs. London is an honor student at St. Joseph's Academy and was awarded the Theology Christian Award.

Megan Guo has trained for 14 years and is a senior at Baton Rouge Magnet High School (BRMHS). She is a Distinct AP Scholar student with a GPA of 4.6. She is a co-founder of Children's Care Club and Vice President of Dance Club. She is also a member of Beta Club, STEM Club, and HOSA Club. She placed in the Top 12 at Youth America Grand Prix (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 Dance Company, Cary Ballet, and The Rock School for Dance. She has choreographed for BRMHS. Her credits with BRBT include Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*, the Winter Fairy in *Cinderella*, and Azalea Fairy, Snow Soloist, and Lead Marzipan in *The Nutcracker*.

Drake Hardy is a professional dancer and instructor located in the Baton Rouge area. His dance career began 8 years ago and recently included him receiving his BFA from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in dance. He has had the privilege of performing throughout the southern United States. Recent showcases have included new dance works such as "Send On The Clowns". This is Drake's first time performing with the Baton Rouge Ballet Theatre.

Irelynn Harris is a freshman at Parkview Baptist School, where she is a member of the Dance Team, Beta Club, Student Council, St Jude's Club, Art Club, and Drama Club. She is on the Principal's List and received the Mercy/Compassion Award. Irelynn has studied at The Dancers' Workshop for 12 years and toured with BRBT's Youth Ballet for five years. This is Irelynn's ninth year performing in BRBT's *The Nutcracker*, one of which she played Clara. Her other credits include BRBT's *Rapunzel*, *Cinderella*, and *Alice in Wonderland*.

Mary Harper Hart (Trainee) has studied dance for 12 years, beginning her training at Powell Moise and then at The Dancers' Workshop. She is an 8th grader at University Lab School, where she is a member of the middle school Dance Team and Student Council. Mary Harper is Parliamentarian of the National Charity League, and a volunteer at First United Methodist Church. Her roles with BRBT include Clara in *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou* and a Playing Card in *Alice in Wonderland*.

Lucy Khemmanyong (Apprentice) is a freshman at Central High School. She began her training at Dance Center School of Performing Arts before transferring to The Dancers' Workshop. She performed in Moscow Ballet's *Great Russian Nutcracker* for three years as a Snowflake, Little Chinese, and Little French. Lucy toured with BRBT's Youth Ballet and performed in BRBT's *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou* as an Angel and Soldier

Rachel Magee is a sophomore at Baton Rouge Magnet High School where she has a 4.0 GPA. She is a member of Dance Club, Spanish Club, and Children's Care Club. Rachel has trained at The Dancers' Workshop for four years and has toured with BRBT's Youth Ballet program. She performed in BRBT's *Cinderella*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou*, the last in which she danced the roles of Clara, Snow, Angel, and Soldier. She was also part of the Ballet for Every Body dance education program last season in which she performed the role of the Duck in *Peter and the Wolf*.

Juliana Martin is a junior at University Lab School where she has a GPA of 4.2. She is a member of the Dance Team, National Honor Society, Key Club, Student Council, Service Club, Cooking Club, and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. She has danced with The Dancers' Workshop for 13 years and has performed all children's roles, Clara, Snow, Flower, Chinese, and Marzipan in BRBT's *The Nutcracker*. She has also appeared in BRBT's *Rapunzel*, *Cinderella*, *Paquita*, and *Alice in Wonderland*.

Danielle Meza is a native of Southern California. She began her ballet training at Inland Pacific Ballet, where she developed a strong foundation in classical technique. She went on to train at prestigious summer intensives, including Ballet Nacional de Cuba, Kirov Academy of Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Alonzo King LINES Ballet, and the Joffrey Academy of Dance Chicago. Danielle later joined the Joffrey Academy's year-round program in Chicago, continuing her pre-professional training full time in 2018. Beyond the studio, Danielle holds a B.S. in kinesiology with an emphasis in exercise science from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. She is currently pursuing her Master of Science in athletic training at Louisiana State University, where she has worked with LSU football, softball, track and field, and completed an internship with the New Orleans Saints. This is her first performance with BRBT, and she is honored to share the stage this season.

Sophia Robison is a student at Baton Rouge Magnet High School, where she 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 BRBT's Youth Ballet. This past summer, she attended the Sarasota Ballet Summer Intensive. She also attended the Regional Dance America Festival in Midland, Texas and performed the role of Clara in BRBT's *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou* in 2023.

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, Louisiana during college. She appeared as the Spring Fairy in BRBT's *Cinderella*, in *Alice in Wonderland*, *Rapunzel* and has performed in many *Nutcrackers*. Elizabeth also volunteers at her church.

Allison Welch is a senior at Sequitur Classical Academy and has trained for 11 years with The Dancers' Workshop. She has toured with BRBT's Ballet for Every Body and Youth Ballet outreach programs and

appeared in numerous season productions. Her roles in BRBT's *Nutcracker* include Marzipan, Lead Snow, and Doll. She originated the role of Dormouse in *Alice in Wonderland* last spring. Alli attended the Vaganova Ballet Intensive at Cosmopolitan Dance Theatre in Boston, Massachusetts.

Claras

Merci Higdon (Trainee) is 13 years old and has been dancing since the age of three. A lifelong homeschooler, she is a member of Youth Ballet and has performed numerous roles in *The Nutcracker*, including Cherub, Mouse, and Party Girl. Since joining Baton Rouge Ballet Theatre, Merci has appeared in *Cinderella*, *Rapunzel*, and *Alice In Wonderland*. From her earliest memories of watching *The Nutcracker*, Merci has dreamed of dancing the role of Clara, and she is honored to bring that dream to life this season. Outside of ballet, Merci enjoys playing the harp, painting, and exploring creative arts.

Sarah Lavigne is a 7th grade honor student at French Settlement High School. She's an active member in her Jr Beta Club and FCA. She started dancing at the age of 2 and quickly fell in love with ballet. She has toured with the Youth Ballet program the past 3 Summers. She also attended RDA in the spring and completed two intensives with BRBT in the Summer. In her free time she enjoys hanging out with friends or gaming with her brothers.

Ai Nguyen is an 8th grader at Sherwood Middle Academic Magnet School. She is a straight A student, a member of the Beta Club and swim team. Ai has participated in *The Nutcracker* for five years, as a Lamb, Cherub, Party Girl, and Bon Bon. For three years she has been a member of Youth Ballet, and she plays the piano. Her positive attitude and hard work shine through in everything she does.

Kate Torrance is a 12-year-old honor roll student in the 7th grade at St. Aloysius Catholic School, where she has been recognized twice with the Principal's Award. A dedicated member of SOS, her school's service-oriented club. Kate is in her sixth-year dancing with The Dancers Workshop and her third year performing with BRBT's Youth Ballet. This season marks her fifth year appearing in *The Nutcracker*, Lamb, Cherub, Party Girl, and Bonbon. Her stage experience also includes BRBT's *Cinderella*, in which she performed as a Midnight Fairy, and *Alice in Wonderland*, where she danced as a Hobby Horse.

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 three decades, currently playing lead guitar with The V-Tones.

Leonard Augustus, Jr. was our first *Nutcracker* and Arabian Prince in *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou*. He later expanded his roles to Party Guest, Mr. Stahlbaum, and now Uncle Drosselmeyer. He uses dance 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 is also a member of BRBT's Ballet for Every Body and tours as the Wolf in *Peter and the Wolf* to area schools.

Emilio Fabian Corona grew up in the Caribbean and learned to dance the merengue, bachata, salsa, mambo, and any other style that required hip action. He is excited to be making his ballet debut in

BRBT's *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou*. Upon completing his fellowship in pulmonary disease and critical care medicine in upstate New York, he relocated to Louisiana to escape the very cold winters. He enjoys being active, cooking, and spending time with his wife and two children.

Ashley Cox trained at The Dancers' Workshop and was a member of BRBT's Youth Ballet and Company. She danced numerous roles in *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou*, *Cinderella*, *Swan Lake*, contemporary works, and was the lead dancer in Christian Youth Theatre Baton Rouge's inaugural performance. After a few summer stints as a zipline guide in the Smoky Mountains and the Northwoods of Wisconsin, she is now the page supervisor at the Bluebonnet Regional Branch Library. Ashley holds a B.A. in creative writing from Louisiana State University, where she is currently pursuing a Master of Library and Information Science degree. In her free time, she is involved in church life and the Latin dancing community.

Leah Cox is a senior at the University of Louisiana Lafayette (ULL), where she is pursuing a degree in dance. She has served as the Vice President and President of the dance honors society, Chi Tau Epsilon, and the Student Representative for ULL's dance program. Leah is a recipient of the Performing Arts Scholarship and is on the President's List. She has worked with national and international choreographers: Fabio Liberti, Norbert De La Cruz, III, and Gabriel Spieller. While at ULL, Leah has performed several soloist roles from ballets that include *Pas de Quatre*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Paquita*, and was the featured soloist in an original work by Brie Castro. Her choreographic works have been performed at American College Dance Association in San Marcos, Texas, Regional Dance America Southwest Festival in Dallas, Texas, as well as BRBT's mixed bill and ULL student-led productions. This past fall, she choreographed her first full-length musical, *Freaky Friday*, for Christian Youth Theatre Lafayette. Summer training opportunities include the Teacher Training Workshop at Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet and Dance West's Summer Dance Intensive in Salt Lake City, Utah. Leah received her early dance training at The Dancers' Workshop and was a BRBT Company Member.

Katie Rose DeLeo is a research associate at Louisiana State University in the Department of Biological Sciences. After earning both her bachelor's and master's degrees in biochemistry from LSU, she joined her current lab to study aging and age-related degenerative diseases. Katie Rose was a BRBT Company member for six years after training at The Dancer's Workshop since the age of three. She danced in BRBT's production of *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou* for many years, starting as a Lamb and eventually earning the roles of Doll and Marzipan. She is excited to return to the ballet as a Party Guest after a ten-year hiatus.

Joseph Desany was born and raised in Ohio but is happy to call Baton Rouge home since 2023. He graduated from Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio with a bachelor's degree in mathematics and is currently an inventory manager at Laville Cabinets. This is Joseph's first time appearing in *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou*. When not in rehearsal or working, Joseph spends his free time playing pickleball and enjoying the outdoors.

Abigail Eskaros is a full-time student at Louisiana State University pursuing a degree in theater arts administration and performance. Throughout middle school and high school, Abigail performed extensively with Christian Youth Theatre (CYT) Baton Rouge. Currently, she teaches theater and rhythm classes for CYT and volunteers in the stage crew for CYT shows. She is a percussionist, and in her free time enjoys composing music and acting in films. This is Abigail's first appearance in *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou*.

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. Elise holds a B.S. in Health Science with a minor in Psychology from Spring Hill

College in Mobile, Alabama. After graduating from LSU Health Sciences Center New Orleans with a Master of Public Health degree in Epidemiology, Elise 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. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her family and friends, traveling, tutoring students in math, and volunteering with her church.

Blake Hammatt is excited to make his debut performance with BRBT as a Party Guest, sharing the stage with his daughter. He is a graduate from LSU with a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering and currently works as a licensed Professional Engineer in Control Systems with S&B for the past fourteen years. He is a long-time supporter of the arts, enjoying local theater, musicals, and Broadway performances. During leisure time, Blake enjoys fishing, pickleball, and LSU baseball.

Mark Herman is excited to be returning to BRBT for his ninth performance as a Party Guest. He is a lifelong resident of Baton Rouge and has practiced law for over 35 years. Mark has been fortunate to share the stage with his daughter, Carolyn, a former BRBT Company member. He enjoys spending time with family, traveling, and researching investment opportunities.

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 Grandmere 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. She is an original member of Molly Buchmann's Wednesday morning adult ballet class. This is her eighth appearance as Grandmother.

Nancy Litton is an accomplished actor with credits in over 100 productions in the Baton Rouge area that include Theatre Baton Rouge (formerly Baton Rouge Little Theater), LSU, Swine Palace, Red Magnolia Theatre Company, Cabaret Theatre, Baker Little Theatre, and more. She is a retired LSU instructor with prior teaching experience throughout Baton Rouge and Europe, including American schools in London, England and Leysin, Switzerland. This is Nancy's first appearance as the Grandmother in BRBT's *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou*.

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 Degree in Biological Sciences and Kinesiology from LSU and a Master of Health Science Degree from the University of South Alabama. In addition to her training at Dancers' Workshop, she has also studied at the International Ballet Competition and the NOCCA summer intensive. A former BRBT Company member, Mary Beth has performed in multiple Spring Concerts, Nutcrackers and RDA Festivals. Some of her previous roles include Doll and Russian in *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou*, and Mother Gothel in *Rapunzel*. She is also an instructor at Elite Gymnastix.

Philip Marx has vivid memories of seeing *The Nutcracker* as a child and is excited to be making his theatrical debut in BRBT's production of *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou*.

A native of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, he likes to joke that his middle name, Louis, destined him to land in Louisiana. He first came to Louisiana as an undergraduate at Tulane and has since returned as an Assistant Professor of Economics at the LSU E. J. Ourso College of Business. He is an eager, if early-stage, social dancer and enjoys playing guitar and spending time in nature.

Bristol Mayo, I is a dedicated professional, family man, and adventurer at heart. After attending Prairie View A&M University, Bristol has 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. Currently, he is a distribution operations manager for Marucci Sports. This is his second season in BRBT's production of *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou*. His other stage

credits include performing in Ballet East's *Nutcracker* in West Palm Beach, Florida. He is proud to be sharing the stage with his two children, Britton and Bristol, II.

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 outreach program and tours area schools in the *Peter and the Wolf* production.

Jakiaya Norman has studied ballet for five years with The Dancers' Workshop and toured with BRBT's Ballet for Every Body educational outreach program. She is a licensed practical nurse who attended Baton Rouge Community College. This is Jakiaya's fifth *Nutcracker* performing as a Soldier and Party Guest. Jakiaya has recently returned from working as a cast member at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, and continues to use her skills as a princess character actress for the local company, Petite Princess.

Francesco Pinque returns for his second season as the Butler. He is a theology teacher at St. Joseph Academy, as well as assistant coach for track and field. Francesco graduated from Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio with a bachelor's in philosophy and communication arts, and a master's in Catholic studies. His theater experience includes playing a villager in a college production of *Beauty and the Beast*.

Michael Puyau is returning to BRBT for his fifth time as the Grandfather. 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 has spent 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 travel. Michael is especially excited this year to be sharing the stage with his daughter, Renee Stelzer, who is performing as a Party Guest.

Renee 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 *The Nutcracker* and other BRBT productions. Renee has also served on BRBT's Board of Trustees. She is a BRBT alum, a graduate of the University of Alabama, and is an Adult Ballet teacher at The Dancers' Workshop.

Wayne Talbot was born and raised in Thibodaux, Louisiana. He completed his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Southwestern Louisiana, now known as the University of Louisiana Lafayette. 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 EBR Public School System. He earned his Master of Education and educational specialist degrees from LSU. During his forty-year career in education, he served as a classroom teacher, a school level administrator, and a district-level administrator for the arts. He retired as EBR Parish School System's Director of Fine Arts. He served at LSU's Christ the King as a music minister for thirty-five years and is a two-time award-winning Star Dancer for Big Buddy. He has performed in *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou* as a Party Guest since 2013.

Drew Thomas is making his premier performance with BRBT as a Party Guest and happy to be sharing the stage with three of his children. He is a graduate of the University of Kentucky and attended Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the head of Upper School at Great Hearts Harveston and has served for over a decade in pastoral ministry. His other theatrical experience includes performing in the *Twin Living Christmas Trees* at Jefferson Baptist Church. In his free time, he enjoys cooking, lifting weights, and spending time with his wife and five children, three of whom are students at The Dancers' Workshop.

Van Vo returns to the stage in his second season with BRBT, this time as Mr. Stahlbaum. He is an accomplished ballroom dancer with fifteen years of experience. A graduate of LSU in Mechanical Engineering, he is a proud local business owner. You can see him in his store, Little Wars, on Jefferson Highway.

Abigail Whitam-Mendoza is excited to take the stage for her second season in BRBT's *The Nutcracker: A Tale from the Bayou* as a Party Guest, after first appearing as a Cook in 2014. She has appeared in multiple musical theatre productions with Central Community Theatre, Christian Community Theatre, and Live Oak Talented Theatre. When she's not on stage, Abigail can be found bright and early reporting the news for WBRZ Channel 2's morning show. She is a proud graduate of Northwestern State University with a bachelor's of mass communication.

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 BRBT 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.