

BALLET THEATRE TURNS 60!

Ballet Theatre Has Reason To Celebrate

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Few people know that Australia's oldest ballet company was founded and developed in Brisbane. This year that company Ballet Theatre of Queensland, celebrates its 60th anniversary, presenting one of the most charming ballets ever choreographed, *The Nutcracker* at Suncorp Theatre from Thursday to Saturday.

The production has more than 45 young dancers ranging in age from eight to 18, who auditioned for the coveted roles in February. The full-length ballet will be a spectacular affair, with a lavish party scene, a colourful candy land and sparkling Land of Snow, exquisite costumes and the glorious music of Tchaikovsky.

Over the past 60 years, the company has grown from a small group of local teachers organising irregular recitals to a full-scale amateur company that has been the training ground for some of the world's finest dancers.

Shane Weatherby and Michelle Giammichele from The Queensland Ballet, Lucette Aldous, former prima ballerina of The Australian Ballet, and Mark Brinkley who last year retired from The Australian Ballet, and Geraldine Turner, who went on to make a name for herself in musical comedy, all began their dancing careers at Ballet Theatre.

Founded in 1937 by Phyllis Danaher and originally named the Australasian Society of Operatic Dancing, the company was designed to provide young dancers with the chance to dance in a professional environment. The company staged its first complete programme at City Hall in 1955. It has continued to present full classical programmes ever since, that are painstakingly professional in all aspects.

According to artistic director Louise Hellewell, fostering a professional attitude is an important part of the whole process of staging a production. "The dancers gain valuable experience by meeting the demands of an exhausting schedule and performing in a theatre such as Suncorp with a proper stage, professional lighting and a professionally designed set," she said. "The demands can be quite taxing, but the rewards come when the dancers hear the applause at the end of the performance, and develop the confidence to go on to bigger and better things in the future."

The family classic, *The Nutcracker* was first presented by ballet Theatre in 1964, and this year, under the artistic direction of Louise as well as Christopher Gillard, the company will present a new interpretation.

Ballet Theatre receives no government funding, relying solely on box office returns and the support of family and friends.