



**NORTH POINTE BALLET**

***Peter Pan***  
**Artistic Audit Results**

2024

With Gratitude,

- Thank you to **The Cleveland Foundation** for support NPB's first cultural appropriations audit
- Thank you to our fellow arts leaders at **Lorain County Arts and Culture Collective** and **OhioDance** whose conversations were the inspiration for this process
- Thank you to **Alexandria Lattimore**, consultant, who lovingly guided NPB through the audit process and helped create a replicable template
- Thank you to the **NPB artists, staff, families, and patrons** for embracing change

*We are using equipment and high-speed internet not available in many indigenous communities. Please take a moment to consider the legacy of colonization embedded within the technology, structures, and ways of thinking we use every day. Many technologies central to the art we make leave significant carbon footprints, contributing to changing climates that disproportionately affect indigenous people worldwide. We invite you to join us in acknowledging this and to consider our roles in reconciliation, decolonization, and ally-ship.*

# Why We Conduct Artistic Audits

After joining other organizations to release an anti-racism statement on June 3, 2020, NPB--realizing that *The Nutcracker* is NPB's largest program that reaches the most members of its community--wanted to make sure that the production **accurately reflected its values** of equity and inclusion. NPB hired a third party to assist in a formal audit of performance and process.

NPB Artistic Staff found that the consultant-led audit laid the groundwork to replicate the process for future productions beyond *The Nutcracker*. In subsequent years, audits of *Wizard of Oz*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Peter Pan* opened the door to valuable conversations and mindful decision-making with the artistic staff.

Knowing that the previous depiction of Indigenous Peoples in NPB's production of *Peter Pan* in 2018 could be viewed as problematic, NPB embraced the opportunity to not only make the necessary changes to its production, but also reflect on other aspect of the production in hopes that artists and patrons can be proud of its final product.

# Tiger Lily and the Natives

It was clear after NPB's Cultural Appropriations Audit of *The Nutcracker* that the fictional Native American princess of Neverland, Tiger Lily, would be re-evaluated. NPB attempted to portray Tiger Lily and the natives with respect in it's 2018 production, but now understands the harm in such cultural appropriations, despite intentions, and has chosen to eliminate these characters in it's 2024 production. NPB apologizes for the harm it has caused in perpetuating this type of portrayal.

Artistic staff took the opportunity to explore what other characters could not only enhance the the story, but also highlight the talents of it's classically-trained ballet dancers. The result was to create ethereal creatures, much like Seasons in *Cinderella* or Fairies in *Sleeping Beauty*, and integrate a *divertissement* element that is common to ballets but was missing from *Peter Pan*.



# Peter and the Lost Boy's Gender Identity

To allow more opportunities for dancers to participate in this production, artistic staff wanted to include more than just boys in the role of "Lost Boys." As it did in 2018, the roles are named "Lost Children."

Named Principal character, including Peter and the principal lost boys, will be danced by female artists but use the names identified in the original story. Artistic staff felt that gender of the performer did not have an effect on the story itself, and made casting choices based on how best to achieve the goal of this production-- which is to entertain audiences by transporting them to a child-like fantasy land.



# Notes on the History of Women Playing Peter Pan

Most assume that the reason Peter Pan is often played by a woman is because of the high range of the vocal part in the musical. However, the character has been played by a woman since before the musical adaptation. A reason suggested by historians is that a woman was cast in the role in order to **keep Peter small to maintain the scale between Peter and the children**. It could also have been because there were laws at the time prohibiting children below the age of 14 from performing after nine o'clock. There may have also been concern that a teen or child wouldn't "be up to the demands of the role", and a performer who was a grown man wouldn't be the right choice for the story, given that Peter's entire persona is about being the boy who never grew up.

Producer Charles Frohman, who first brought the show to Broadway, also likely played a key role in the development of Peter. He wanted to see Maude Adams, a personal favourite, in the role, and he lobbied hard for her inclusion. When the production launched in England, Nina Boucicault took it on. The two women simultaneously cemented the idea in the minds of the public that Peter Pan was a trouser role, destined to be played by women. Through various versions of the stage production, women consistently played the lead, creating a rich tradition that became impossible to ignore.\*

When Peter Pan was adapted as a musical in 1954, Mary Martin made the role famous. With women dominating the stage in conventional and musical versions of the production, Peter was effectively sealed into the public consciousness as a "trouser role," and few producers looked back.\*

*\*References: Global Comment*

# “Trousers Roles” versus “En Farce”

In theater, female roles are often played by male roles and referred to using the theatrical term, “en farce.” During the audit process, staff members dug a little deeper into the meaning and discovered that en farce is not necessarily gender-related, but rather “comic dramatic content that uses highly improbable situations, stereotyped characters, and extravagant exaggeration,” with some definitions using the phrase “Unscripted buffoonery.” In NPB’s 2021 Nutcracker audit, it was determined that the artistic staff did not want the “joke” of Mother Ginger to be gender identity, but instead wanted the focus and silliness to be on the bon bons and the relationship of mother figure to child.

“Trousers roles”, alternatively, are not intentionally poking fun or exaggerating a stereotype, but are roles where female performers commonly play male characters.

Understanding the role itself, the history of the role, and the meaning behind why past producers have made the choice to cast a particular character was an important part of the audit process to allow the artistic directors to move forward with casting the performers who best fit each role.

# Villainizing the Disabled

In the summer of 2021, NPB Artistic Director attended the Dancing Wheels Teacher Certification Program funded by the Community Foundation of Lorain County. During the 2-week program, the DW staff and program participants discussed the villainization of disabled people, including specifically the characters of Captain Hook (amputee) as well as Drosselmeyer (often depicted with an eye patch.)

After considering various alternatives, NPB determined that the disability depicted was important to the storyline of the production, and decided that instead of removing the disability from the character, staff would be intentional about the story behind the character and his motives and use lessons learned from the DW summer program to inspire empathy within the cast.







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*Audit conducted by Janet Dziak and Melaina McConnell*

*Slides created by Janet Dziak*