



Get ready for Puss in ballet shoes

A new ballet based on the much-loved fairytale Puss in Boots, and aimed specifically at children, will be visiting venues in the North East as part of a 20-theatre nationwide tour.

The Northern Ballet production will embark on a major national tour in spring next year, between April to June, following its world premier in Leeds last month.

Inspired by the popular fairytale, Puss in Boots tells the story of a remarkable cat who, despite being both clever and charming, always seems to bring his master bad luck.

This child-friendly, 40-minute ballet follows their adventure as they meet a flurry of characters and even come face to face with royalty.

The ballet has been created especially for children and their families

to experience live dance, music and theatre together.

Puss in Boots follows in the footsteps of the company's five previous children's ballets, including the Little Mermaid, all of which have achieved huge popularity both live on stage and in CBeebies TV adaptations.

Choreographed by Jenna Lee, founder and creative director of JLeeProductions and former English National Ballet Soloist, Puss in Boots will feature set designs by Ali Allen, lighting by Alastair West, costume designs by Jenna Lee in collaboration with Kim Brassley and Carley Marsh, and music composed by Richard Norriss, played live by members of Northern Ballet Sinfonia at every venue.

Daniel de Andrade, Northern Ballet's artistic director of children's ballets, said: "We are delighted to be touring Puss in Boots so extensively across the country next spring.

"Our short ballets have been enchanting children across the UK for several years, creating a truly magical live dance experience for the whole family to enjoy. We now look forward to continuing that tradition with Jenna Lee's new production."

Puss in Boots will be at Northern Stage in Newcastle on Thursday, April 18 2019 at 12.30pm and 2.30pm, see www.northernstage.co.uk or contact the box office on 0191 230 5151. For more information please visit www.northernballet.com/boots

You didn't know your stuff, got it wrong and failed

Paul Benneworth



I AM currently moving jobs, something that's left me feeling slightly nostalgic. My whole career has been as an academic, and a big part of my job is linking our students up with the best ideas globally by being involved in cutting-edge research.

This means even in a relatively small, remote city like Newcastle, universities teach students the latest ideas, technologies and techniques. More importantly, students are taught by staff who are actively developing these discoveries, being experts in their own fields.

We develop our expertise and share our discoveries with others by writing about them. In the two decades I've been working, I've written a fair number of articles, books, newspaper pieces and policy reports.

My move means sorting out my stuff, and my natural curiosity and nostalgia drew me to look at my earliest work. The first piece I ever wrote was a submission to a House of Lords Inquiry into the future of the European Structural Funds, and in particular its implications for North East England.

The Structural Funds come from the EU to less-successful places to stimulate their growth, and were a critical factor in kicking off the North East's industrial 1990s industrial renaissance.

Back in 1996, ten new poor countries joining the EU was an existential threat to the hundreds of millions of pounds we received annually from Europe. I'd crunched the numbers and found that unless the rules changed, then we'd lose out big style.

These ten new members would drag average income down, leaving us with an above average income. But there was no way that 15 members would vote to slash benefits to themselves, so I predicted that the rules would change to ensure that regions like the North East continued to benefit from the single market.

The way the EU works is relatively easy to predict, but even so, I was amazed to read my predictions about what would happen largely having come true. And even today, the North East receives substantial EU

funding to improve the local economy in areas that London has long been unwilling to fund.

It's reassuring to rediscover that academics really know something about the world can reasonably predict events' consequences. Particularly in today's Trumpian world where government decision-making is based upon a poisonous mix of cruelty, prejudice and indifference to suffering.

Michael Gove summed this position up when he said that the people had heard enough of experts. He implied that common-sense politicians such as himself, spared troublesome academics' affectations, were uniquely capable of solving the Brexit conundrum.

Us experts have been troublesome since 2016, pointing out the impossibility of getting a good Brexit 'deal'. If you know the rules then it's easy to predict what will happen, but Gove and his ilk said their common sense was a better guide than our hard-earned expertise.

And the politicians delivering Brexit have certainly been reliant on their common sense. A Northern Ireland secretary didn't know there were different political parties over the Irish Sea, and a Brexit secretary didn't know the UK's food supply depended on the Channel link.

They've pressed on with their common-sense Conservatism, unburdened by our understanding and expertise.

So it's been so gratifying in the unfolding political chaos to see May and colleagues so completely spatchcocked by their proudly self-professed ignorance.

We experts told them the reasons their plans wouldn't work and they threw it back in our face, telling us we were sour, we lost and should get over it.

So let me say this in language they'll understand. You didn't know your stuff: you got it wrong and failed. Now suck it up and learn!

■ Dr Paul Benneworth is a senior researcher at the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies at the University of Twente in the Netherlands.