

Creative
Kids
Education
Foundation

Presents

The Nutcracker

Clara's Christmas Tale

*An interactive
ballet storybook*

Discovery Guide

Play the free Interactive Game at GoClassical For Kids!

www.goclassical.org/kids/nutcracker



Who's Who Main Characters



The Sugar Plum Fairy

The enchanting ruler of the Land of Sweets, she embodies grace and elegance, and orchestrates the magical events of the story.

The Nutcracker Prince

The Nutcracker doll comes to life as a Handsome Prince after he defeats the Mouse King in battle and leads Clara on a fantastical journey through the Land of Sweets.



Clara

A young girl who dreams of adventure and magic, Clara becomes the heroine of the story after receiving a Nutcracker doll on Christmas Eve.

Uncle Drosselmeyer

Clara's mysterious uncle and a skilled toymaker, he brings the toy Nutcracker to life and watches over Clara.

The Mouse King

The frightening Mouse King leads an army of mice in a battle against Clara and the Nutcracker Prince.

Who's Who *Ensemble Characters*

Party Dancers

A lively group of adults and children who celebrate Christmas at Clara's family gathering, adding a festive atmosphere to the opening scene.



Mouse Army

Comprising a mischievous and chaotic group, the Mouse Army engages in a serious battle against the Nutcracker Prince's Toy Soldier army, adding excitement and tension to the story.



Flower Dancers

Vibrant and colorful, these dancers celebrate the arrival of Clara and the Nutcracker Prince with joyful and fluid movements in the Land of Sweets.

Toy Soldiers

Rigid and disciplined, these dancers mimic the movements of toy soldiers, embodying the charm and whimsy of Clara's dream.



The Storyline


Act 1 The ballet opens on Christmas Eve at the home of the wealthy Stahlberg family. Grandparents and guests arrive to celebrate the holiday and decoration of the Christmas tree with the Stahlberg parents and their children, Clara and Fritz. The children are dancing country-style dances common to wealthy families during the Imperial period in Russia. Suddenly a mysterious figure enters the room. It's Clara's Uncle Drosselmeyer, a magician and well-known toy maker who has brought gifts for the children, including a special wooden Nutcracker doll for Clara. Fritz with a younger brother's jealousy grabs the doll and breaks it. Drosselmeyer fixes the Nutcracker and the celebration continues.

After the guests depart, Clara carefully places her special doll under the Christmas tree and is taken off to bed by her nanny.



Grand pas de deux
of the Sugar Plum Fairy,
Escuela Superior de Música y Danza

The house grows dark and Clara sneaks back into the room to check on her Nutcracker. She falls asleep under the Christmas tree and the clock strikes midnight. She awakens to see the room filled with mice led by a gigantic Mouse King! The Christmas tree begins to grow to enormous heights and the Nutcracker doll transforms into a soldier general who leads the toy soldiers under the tree in a battle against the evil mice and their King. The mice seem to be winning when Clara, determined to help her Nutcracker, strikes the Mouse King with her slipper. The mice are defeated and the battle is won. Suddenly the Nutcracker changes into a handsome Prince. He leads Clara through the moonlight night to a sleigh which carries them to the Land of Sweets.



Act 2 Clara and the Prince travel to the magical Land of Sweets which is ruled by the Sugar Plum Fairy. The Prince tells her that Clara saved him from the Mouse King which broke the spell and allowed him to transform back into himself. In Clara's honor, the Sugar Plum Fairy creates beautiful dances to celebrate the occasion. Clara dances with the Prince and as the party comes to a close, Uncle Drosselmeyer arrives to lead her home. Clara wants to remain with the Prince but at the end she sadly says goodbye and leaves this special kingdom. Awakening in her own bedroom she wonders if this was all a dream.

A Brief History of the Nutcracker Ballet

TIME: 1816 – 1872

PLACE: Nuremberg Germany

"The Nutcracker" ballet was originally composed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and choreographed by Marius Petipa in 1892, based on E.T.A. Hoffmann's story "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King." The ballet premiered in December 1892 at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia, but the premiere of the piece was not very successful.

Over time, the enchanting score, featuring iconic pieces like the "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy," gained popularity, particularly in the United States. In the 1930s, a pivotal production by George Balanchine for the New York City Ballet reimagined the work, introducing new choreography and a more narrative-driven approach.

This production played a crucial role in establishing "The Nutcracker" as a beloved holiday tradition in America. Today, it is performed by countless ballet companies around the world during the Christmas season, often featuring lavish sets and costumes. The story follows young Clara and her magical journey with the Nutcracker Prince, highlighting themes of childhood wonder and imagination. Through its enchanting music and captivating choreography, "The Nutcracker" has become a timeless classic, symbolizing the spirit of the holidays and introducing generations to the art of ballet.



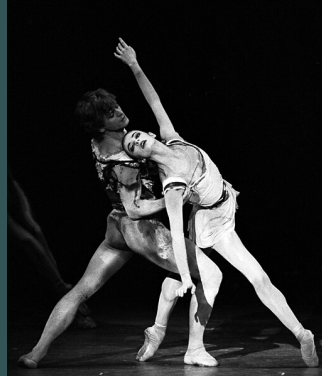
Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Marius Petipa

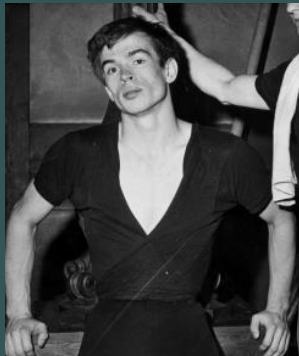


History of Ballet

Imperial Mariinsky Theatre



Mikhail Baryshnikov and Alessandra Ferri
Gary Friedman, Los Angeles Times



Rudolph Nureyev
Pressens Bild/Scanpix



Vaganova Academy



Original cast members of the Nutcracker Ballet 1892



Nutcracker Ballet 1892 Mariinsky Theatre

Ballet began in the Italian Renaissance courts of the 15th century, where it served as an elaborate form of entertainment for nobility. It flourished in France during the reign of King Louis XIV, who established the Académie Royale de Danse in 1661, setting standards for training and performance. By the 19th century, the Romantic era introduced iconic works like "Giselle," showcasing themes of fantasy and emotion. This period also saw the rise of the Russian ballet tradition, particularly with the Imperial Ballet in St. Petersburg, Russia, where choreographers like Marius Petipa created masterpieces such as "Swan Lake" and "The Nutcracker."

The Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet is a school of classical ballet in St Petersburg, established in 1738 during the reign of Empress Anna. Many of the world's leading ballet schools have adopted elements of the Vaganova method into their own training. Notable graduates of the Academy include Mikhail Baryshnikov, Rudolph Nureyev, and Natalia Makarova.

In the early 20th century, the Ballets Russes, founded by Sergei Diaghilev, brought Russian ballet to the forefront of international dance, blending traditional techniques with innovative choreography and collaborations with artists like painter Pablo Picasso and composer Igor Stravinsky. This influence inspired American ballet development, leading to the establishment of significant institutions such as the School of American Ballet in 1934. Companies like New York City Ballet, founded by George Balanchine, helped define American ballet with a unique blend of classical and modern styles.

Pointe Shoes



POINTE SHOES are worn by female dancers when performing pointe work and most often during performances. Pointe shoes have evolved to enable women to dance on their toes for extended periods of time and usually are in shades of light pink. There are two fabric ribbons and an elastic band to secure the shoes to a dancer's feet. The locations of the elastic band and ribbons are important to make sure the shoes fit the dancer's foot. Many dancers choose to sew the ribbons and elastics to their shoes to ensure the shoes are secure. Most dancers use several methods to prevent discomfort in their shoes and tape is often wrapped around toes to reduce blisters.



Ballet Shoes



SOFT BALLET SHOES, also called ballet slippers, are made from soft leather, canvas, or satin. Women dancers traditionally wear pink shoes, and men wear black or white. In a ballet class, male dancers wear ballet shoes throughout the class and women begin class wearing ballet slippers but then change into pointe shoes for more difficult work.

The Music

The timeless classical music of the Nutcracker Ballet has become one of Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's most popular compositions around the world. The musical themes represent some of the composer's most famous melodies belonging to the Romantic period of music history. His music forged a very personal but recognizable Russian style.

Some of the most beautiful music written for the Nutcracker Ballet is said to have been composed after the death of his sister Alexandra, especially the expressive and sad melody for the last act's "Pas de deux" which is the lovely dance between the characters of Clara and her Prince, interrupted by her Uncle Drosselmeyer.



Toys of the Time *of the Nutcracker Story*

NUTCRACKER DOLLS

NUTCRACKER DOLLS originate from the late 17th century, particularly in the Ore Mountains region of Germany. The dolls are most commonly made to look like German toy soldiers, and in German traditions are symbols of good luck, and supposed to frighten away evil spirits. They were often given as presents and at some point began to be associated with the Christmas celebrations as in the story of the Nutcracker Ballet when Drosselmeyer gives a beautiful Nutcracker doll to Clara.



ADVENT CALENDARS

THE GERMAN ADVENT CALENDAR TRADITION goes back to the 19th century, as a way for families to mark the days leading up to the celebration of Christmas. The first known wooden advent calendar was created in 1851 and the first advent calendar with small doors was made in the early 1950s. Modern calendars are usually filled with chocolate candies which the children eat when they open a door of the calendar each day leading up to Christmas. The calendar doors open to reveal an image, a poem, a portion of a story (such as the story of the Nativity of Jesus), or a small gift, such as a toy or a chocolate item.



HOBBY HORSE

The HOBBY HORSE dates back to medieval times, originally taking the form of a simple frame or stick with a head, used by children to mimic horseback riding. Over the centuries, it evolved into various forms, including stuffed versions and mounted toys, becoming a beloved staple in childhood play across cultures.



Christmas Traditions



The Christmas tree has its origins in ancient pagan traditions, where evergreen trees symbolized life and renewal during the winter months. In medieval Germany, the first decorated trees emerged as part of the celebration of Christmas, with records dating back to the 16th century. These early Weihnachtsbaum ("Christmas Tree" in German) were adorned with fruits, nuts, and candles, representing the light of Christ coming into the world. Christmas tree lights (traditionally real candles, though today generally replaced by electric lights) adorn the tree. The custom gradually spread throughout Europe, and by the 19th century, the Christmas tree became a beloved centerpiece of holiday festivities, bringing families together to decorate and celebrate.

In addition to the Christmas tree, many historical traditions evolved around the holiday season. For instance, in England, the practice of hanging stockings by the fireplace can be traced back to the story of St. Nicholas, who was known for his generosity and gift-giving. Similarly, the Yule log, originally burned to celebrate the winter solstice, became a symbol of warmth and comfort during Christmas, often decorated and saved to light the next year.

Traditionally, on Heiligabend ("Christmas Eve") in Germany, a simple meal will be prepared and served before or after Bescherung ("time for exchanging gifts"). Commonly, after church services the returning children wait to enter into their living room until a little bell rings. This bell marks the departure of the one who is delivering gifts, usually Der Weihnachtsmann ("Saint Nicholas" or "Santa Claus").



Resources

Books

Becoming a Ballerina: A Nutcracker Story

by Lise Friedman and Mary Dowdle

Steps in Ballet: Basic Exercises at the Barre

by Thalia Mara

The Ballet Book: The Young Performer's Guide to Classical Dance

by Karen Kain

The Nutcracker (illustrated picture book)

by Valeria Docampo

A Child's Introduction to the Nutcracker: The Story, Music, Costumes, and Choreography of the Fairy Tale Ballet

by Heather Alexander and Amelie Videlio

Teacher Downloads

Download excellent Nutcracker Ballet Teacher Resources from the Joffrey Ballet at their web site:

www.joffrey.org/education/community-engagement/community-programs/nutcracker-story-resources

Play the Game!

Play the free Interactive Game at GoClassical For Kids!

www.goclassical.org/kids/nutcracker

Videos

A Day in the Life of a Ballerina

www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLouywuk5js

Nutcracker ballerinas' most important accessory: Pointe shoes

www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxh2pxuep3U

How Ballerinas Customize their Pointe Shoes

www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tISaWeO9q8

Joffrey Ballet Auditions

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hdheol6Anug

Nutcracker Ballet Behind the Scenes, Royal Ballet

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fu0tp8xOYu4

Nutcracker Ballet Royal Ballet in rehearsal

www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2xIz8ZCW4Y

These resource links are accurate as of October 2024.

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