



SAINT LOUIS BALLET'S  
**THE  
NUTCRACKER**

**DISCOVER DANCE!**  
SAINT LOUIS BALLET'S CURRICULUM  
GUIDE FOR STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND  
PARENTS

# The Story

The Nutcracker Ballet is based on the story “The Nutcracker and the King of Mice” written by E.T.A. Hoffman. Although what is seen on the stage today is different in detail from the original story, the basic plot remains the same; The story of a young German girl who dreams of a Nutcracker Prince and a fierce battle against a Mouse King.

When Marius Petipa had the idea to choreograph the story into a ballet, it was actually based on a revision by Alexander Dumas, a well known French author. His version reflects more of what we have come to love as the Nutcracker Ballet.

## The Party Scene

It is Christmas Eve at the Stahlbaum house -- A large and grand house with the most beautiful tree imaginable. The Stahlbaums are hosting their annual Christmas party, welcoming the arrival of their family and friends. The children, Clara and Fritz, are dancing and playing as they welcome their friends too.

The party grows festive with music and dance as godfather Drosselmeyer arrives. He is a skilled clock and toy maker and always full of surprises. Drosselmeyer draws everyone’s attention as he presents two life-size dolls. They are the delight of the party, each taking a turn to dance.

The children begin to open gifts when Drosselmeyer presents his to Clara and Fritz. Although his gift to Fritz is quite nice, he gives Clara a beautiful Nutcracker that becomes the hit of the party. Fritz becomes jealous and, having a bit more spunk than a boy should have, grabs the nutcracker from Clara and promptly breaks it. Clara is heartbroken looking on as Drosselmeyer quickly repairs the Nutcracker with a handkerchief he magically draws from the air.

As the evening grows late, the guests depart and the Stahlbaum family retires for the evening. Clara, worried about



her beloved Nutcracker, sneaks back to the tree to check on him, falling asleep with him in her arms.

## The Fight Scene

As the clock strikes midnight strange things begin to happen. Clara begins shrinking as her beautiful Christmas tree grows high above her. The toys around the tree come to life while the room fills with an army of mice, lead by the fierce Mouse King. As the Nutcracker awakens, he leads his army of toy soldiers into battle with the mice. The Mouse King corners the Nutcracker and battles him one-on-one. The Nutcracker seems to be no match for the Mouse King.

The Nutcracker and his army can go on no longer and are captured by the mice and their King. Clara makes a final

daring charge throwing her slipper at the Mouse King, hitting him square on the head. The Mouse King drops to the floor and the mice run away, carrying off their leader’s lifeless body.

## The Land of Snow

The Nutcracker turns into a Prince and takes Clara on a journey to the Land of Snow, an enchanted forest wonderland where they are welcomed by dancing snowflakes.

## The Land of Sweets

The Prince escorts Clara to the Land of Sweets where they are greeted by the Sugar Plum Fairy. The Prince tells her about their daring battle with the army of mice and she rewards them with a celebration of dances.

- The Spanish Dance
- The Arabian Dance
- The Russian Dance
- The Chinese Dance
- The Mirliton Dance
- The Waltz of Flowers

As a finale, the Sugar Plum Fairy and the Cavalier dance a beautiful Pas De Deux.

## The Dream Ends

Clara awakens from her dream and finds herself by her Christmas tree with her beloved Nutcracker.

---

# Questions

1. Can you name three remarkable things that happen in the Stahlbaum living room at midnight?
2. How does Clara save the Nutcracker Prince?
3. How does the Nutcracker get broken?
4. Who gives Clara the nutcracker?
5. Who wrote the story of The Nutcracker?
6. Where does the Prince take Clara first?
7. Where does Act I take place?
8. Where does Act II take place?

# The Composer



The music of the Nutcracker Ballet was composed by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Born in the Ural mountains of Russia, he dedicated his life to music. In 1850 to 1859, he attended the school of Jurisprudence and studied piano. In 1861, he attended classes with the Russian Music Society. In 1862, he entered the Saint Petersburg Conservatory. It was there that Tchaikovsky would produce his first overture.

Beginning in 1866, Tchaikovsky taught at the Moscow Conservatory while composing many of his concertos and symphonies. Throughout the 1870's he enjoyed moderate success with the Second and Third Symphonies, operas "The Oprichnik" and "Vakula the Smith" and with the ballet "Swan Lake." He resumed his successful career in the 1880's, composing the "1812 Overture," the "Hamlet Overture-Fantasia," "Symphony No. 5 in E Minor," and the composition sketch to "The Sleeping Beauty," among others.

By 1890, he had completed one of his most successful operas, "The Queen of Spades," and made his first and only trip to the United States. In 1892, after his return, he lent his melodic gifts to the ballet "The Nutcracker," which surprisingly enjoyed little success during his lifetime. The man who made such an indelible mark on music passed away on November 6, 1893, in St. Petersburg, Russia.

# Listen and Imagine

Listen to the music from The Nutcracker. Imagine you are going on an adventure. What types of instruments do you hear? What do you think of when you hear the music? How do they make you feel? What is the weather like on your imaginary journey? What colors do you see on the way? What characters do you meet along the way? Write a poem below describing your journey.

---

Illustrate your poem here:

# What is Ballet?

Today a ballet performance may include several different types of ballet, such as an excerpt from a nineteenth century classical ballet or a one-act contemporary ballet. A ballet's subject may range from a child's fairy tale to a psychological drama to an abstract idea, or it may be a "pure dance" ballet with no subject at all. The dancers may wear pointe shoes or street shoes or no shoes. Costumes may be ornate and classical, or look as if they were purchased off the rack of a local department store.

The differences in movement can be equally striking. The dancers may move in a grand, noble manner; they may appear to spend more time in the air than on the ground; they may dazzle the audience with the speed of their turns and the beats of their legs - all characteristics of classical ballet. In the next dance, however, the same performers may explore areas of expression in body movement and stage space in a manner more akin to modern dance than to ballet. Another time the movement may seemingly have wandered off the Broadway stage or out of the TV screen.

Although these kinds of ballets seem quite dissimilar, they nevertheless are all called ballets. There are two important similarities that hold these styles together under the title of ballet:

- (1) they are all theatrical dances that blend movement, music, and decor (scenic design, lighting, costumes); and
- (2) they are all performed by dancers who have been trained primarily in what is called classical ballet technique.

Classical ballet's technique and terminology are reasonably standard. There are a few differences of interpretation between various schools and teachers, but these do not interfere with the universality of ballet training. The terminology is French and is understood in every country where ballet is taught, although teachers and pupils may not know a word of French other than those words used in the ballet classroom. Beginning from this standard base, ballet dancers learn to dance in many ways, which makes ballet an exciting, versatile art.

---

## Your day at the Ballet

Write a letter to a friend describing your day at the Saint Louis Ballet's *The Nutcracker*. In the letter you may include the following: What did you wear? How did you get to the theatre? With whom did you come? What did the theatre look like? Describe the dancing and the music and how you felt when you watched *The Nutcracker*. Who was your favorite character.

# Ballet Vocabulary

**Adagio** A dance movement done in a slow tempo.

**Allegro** A dance movement done in a fast tempo.

**Arabesque** A ballet position in which one leg is raised straight behind the body while the dancer balances on the other leg. The position has many variations, with the leg sometimes low and sometimes very high, with the leg pointed almost straight up, as in arabesque penchee.

**Attitude** A ballet position in which one leg is raised either in front of (attitude avant) or behind (attitude derriere) the body, with the knee slightly bent.

**Ballerina** This is a title that is given to principal, or 'star' female dancers in a ballet company.

**Ballet** From the Italian, ballare, to dance.

**Ballet d'Action** A dance that tells a story.

**Barre** The wooden rail that is attached to the walls of a dance studio for dancers to hold onto during warm-up. The barre is used to help dancers find and practice balance.

**Batterie** A term referring to the fast and rhythmic beating of the legs, one against the other, to add excitement to a jump.

**Bourees** A series of many tiny steps on points that make the dancer seem to glide across the stage.

**Character Dance** Folk dances that have their roots in different countries of the world. Examples: Mazurka-Polish; Czardas-Hungarian; Bolero-Spanish; Gigue-French. The term character dance also refers to roles that are largely mimed or comic such as the role of Dr. Coppelius in the ballet *Coppelia*.

**Choreographer** A person who creates all the movements that are performed in a ballet.

**Corps de ballet** Dancers in a ballet company who appear in groups on stage and dance together. Comparative to the singers in a chorus.

**Danseur Noble** This is a title that is given to principal male dancers in a ballet company.

**Demi-plie** A small, or half, knee bend.

# Theatre Etiquette

**Divertissement** A group of short dance numbers that appear, one after another, usually in the final act of a ballet.

**Elevation** The height to which a dancer can jump.

**Glissade** A gliding step

**Grand jete** A big leap in the air.

**Grand plie** A deep knee bend.

**Jete** A jump in which the weight of the body is thrown from one foot to the other.

**Mime** Movements that a dancer uses to 'talk' without words.

**Pirouette** A complete turn of the body done while standing on one leg.

**Pointe work** Dancing on the tips of the toes. This technique began during the romantic period (early in the 1800s) and was used to make the ballerina appear weightless. Today all female ballet dancers must master the difficulties of this technique.

**Port de Bras** Term used to define the movements of the arms and upper torso of a ballet dancer.

**Releve** Rising up on the toes.

**Tutu** A full skirt worn by the ballet dancers, usually made of many layers of thin material. It may be standing straight out from the hips, or be longer, reaching the knees or calves.

**Variation** A solo dance, which may be performed by either a male or female dancer. Usually both the male and female principal dancers have a variation in classical ballets.

When you come to the theatre, you will be treated as a very special guest. The people in the theatre have only one goal: to help you be happy that you came. Whether you are coming to see a play, a musical, a concert, or a ballet, the rules are the same. The people on the stage are called the performers. The people who come to see them are called the audience. The performers are working very hard to share with you the happiness they feel when they perform. When you show that you are paying attention and are enjoying the show by clapping, smiling, and laughing, it helps them to do any even better job. If you talk during the performance, or do things that attract attention to you rather than to the performance, the dancers will have a harder time giving you a very good show.

## Things to do during the show:

Do make sure you are ready to sit and enjoy the show in plenty of time before the show starts: get a drink of water if you are thirsty, visit the bathroom, get a Kleenex if you need one.

Do make yourself comfortable in your seat.

Do laugh if the dancers do something funny.

Do clap if you want to show the dancers you liked what you saw.

Do tell a teacher, parent, or chaperone before the show if the person in front of you is so tall that you may not be able to see well. Sometimes it helps to change places to make sure everybody can see.

## Things not to do during the show:

Don't leave your seat once the show starts. The theatre will be dark, and people should leave their seats only if they have a very important need to.

Don't chew gum, or bring food or drinks of any kind into the theatre.

Don't stand up. The people behind you won't be able to see!

Don't take pictures.

Don't talk during the show – not to your neighbor or to the dancers. There will be lots of time after the show to talk, and you can show that you enjoy the show by clapping.

## What's going on at the Ballet?

Check out what's happening at the Saint Louis Ballet and the Saint Louis Ballet School by visiting our website [www.stlouisballet.org](http://www.stlouisballet.org)

Color the Nutcracker

