



# The Nutcracker

## How the Ballet Came To Be...



New York Theatre Ballet

E.T.A Hoffmann's fairy tale, *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, was first transformed into magic by composer Peter Illyich Tchaikovsky and choreographer Marius Petipa, in Russian in 1892. It was the third and last ballet composed and choreographed by the team of Tchaikovsky and Petipa. Their other collaborations were *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*. As a choreographer, Petipa knew how to tell a story and make hearts dance. Tchaikovsky composed memorable, beautiful music that elevated ballet music to a serious orchestral form equal to that of a symphony.

In the 114 years since the first performance of the ballet, there have been many different versions, running the gamut of theatrical entertainment. Many choreographers have created their own versions.

Keith Michael created New York Theatre Ballet's one hour version in 1985. Since then, the ballet has been performed annually not only in New York, but across the United States.

## *The Artists and Designers of NYTB's Nutcracker*

Choreography by Keith Michael

Music by Peter Tchaikovsky

Costume Design by Sylvia Taalsohn Nolan

Set, Property Design & Painting by Gillian Bradshaw-Smith

featuring the New York Theatre Ballet &

Children of Ballet School NY,

(the official training academy of NYTB)

Diana Byer, Artistic Director

# The Story

It is nearly midnight on Christmas Eve in the Stahlbaum household. There has been an elegant and merry party, marred only by the absence of the family's favorite Uncle Drosselmeyer. Dr. & Mrs. Stahlbaum are just sending their daughter, Clara, off to bed when he finally arrives. He unveils the toy doll house he has made, an exact replica inside and out of the Stahlbaum mansion. His cloak and scarves come off with a life of their own, and the darkened tree is relit by magic. When Drosselmeyer passes his hands over the doll house, the most entrancing wooden man suddenly stands before Clara: The Nutcracker!

A lively gavotte begins and Clara dances with her curious Nutcracker doll. As quickly as he arrived, Uncle Drosselmeyer says good night, and with a look at his great pocket watch he warns Clara to put her Nutcracker to bed and not to disturb him until morning.

But Clara is drawn to her new doll. Remembering Drosselmeyer's warning, she falls asleep in the moonlight on the living room floor, curled beside her beloved Nutcracker. The room suddenly fills with mice, led by their raucous King. The Nutcracker springs to life to protect Clara. In the heat of battle, his sword is knocked from his hand. When Clara bravely attacks the Mouse King with her pillow, the Nutcracker grabs him by the tail, swings him around and around, and banishes him from the living room.

As the Nutcracker pledges his gratitude to Clara, the living room falls away. They find themselves in a fairy sled, guided by the Snow King and Queen through a world of swirling snowflakes.

After becoming separated from her Nutcracker by a storm, Clara opens her eyes to a dreamland of candy streamers, lemonade rivers, and gumdrop and ice cream mountains. She is reunited with her Nutcracker, who is ruler of the land, and welcomed by the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier with their Plumlet attendants. A parade of colorful dolls from around the world dance for Clara's entertainment. And when the Sugar Plum Fairy dances, she seems to be the essence of all that is good and beautiful in the world.

At the height of the festivities, Clara is returned home. She finds herself before her Christmas tree, the Nutcracker doll once again in her arms. Was it all a dream? For Clara, it has all been as real as the Christmas morning to which she has awakened.



## The Characters

Act I:

Uncle Drosselmeyer

Dr. & Mrs. Stahlbaum

Clara

The Mouse King

The Mouselets

The Nutcracker

The Snow King

The Snow Queen

The Snowflakes

Act II:

The Sugar Plum Fairy

The Cavalier

The Plumlets

Spanish Dancers

Arabian Dancers

Chinese Dancer

Marzipan Shepherdess

Marzipan Sheep

Russian Dancer

Dolls

Flowers



## The Design

New York Theatre Ballet's production of *The Nutcracker* is based on lithographs from the English Toy Theatre or "Juvenile Drama" of the early 19th Century. Hundreds of operas and plays were at that time produced in the form of paper cut-out books, complete with sets, properties, characters, and costume changes. Offered in either "penny plain" (black and white line drawings) or "two-pence coloured" (elegant multi-colored lithographs), a child's toy theatre helped many an afternoon pass with industry and imagination.

## Reading List

### For Children:

#### *The Nutcracker*

E.T. A. Hoffman, author

Maurice Sendack, Illustrator

Crown Publisher/060961049

Ages 8 & up

#### *The Nutcracker Ballet*

Deborah Hautzig, Author

Diane Goode, Illustrator

Random House/0394881788

Ages 3 ~ 7

### For Adults:

#### *Nutcracker Nation*

Jennifer Fisher, Author

Yale University Press/ 0300097468

Members of NYTB  
in *The Nutcracker*.



NYTB's *Nutcracker* has been performed over 1,000 times since 1985. The Mouse King and Mouselets costumes are part of the original production and still worn today.

Photos © Richard Termine

## Did You Know...

The very first performance was given in Russia in 1892 and NYTB's first performance was in 1985. NYTB has performed the ballet over 1,000 times all over the USA!

There are 14 children's roles in NYTB's *The Nutcracker*. Three different children share each part. The children range in age from 6-14 and are chosen from classes at Ballet School NY, NYTB's official school. They rehearse over 20 hours before their first performance.

The "real world" that Clara lives in is all black and white. The Nutcracker doll is the first magical color that Clara sees, introducing her to the colorful fantasy worlds of The Land of the Snow and The Land of the Sweets.

Each one of the toys around Uncle Drosselmeyer's neck represents one of the scenes of *The Nutcracker* ballet: the clock – the Stahlbaum's living room, the sword – the Battle with the Mouse King, the ballerina doll – The Land of the Snow, and the jumping jack doll – The Land of the Sweets.

Over the years, the Russian dance in The Land of the Sweets has been choreographed for dancers, an acrobat team, a gymnast, a stilt-walker, three different jugglers (of clubs, of balls, and of boxes), a hoop dancer and a hula-hooper!

Look carefully for the two small paintings on the backdrop of the Stahlbaum's living room- each is a miniature of The Land of Snow and The Land of the Sweets backdrops.



## After the Show

After the show help students write a review and send it to the company. The children can draw pictures of their favorite dancers or actors and send it to them. Maybe a dancer or actor will correspond with your child.

For young children 3 – 6

Bring a stuffed animal or favorite doll so they can share the experience with their make believe friend. A small intimate production is sometimes best. It's easier to relate to the characters then in a big theater where they are sitting far away from the action.

NYTB's *Nutcracker* is held annually at Florence Gould Hall, 55 East 59th Street.

Visit [www.nytb.org](http://www.nytb.org) for information.

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## Preparing Your Students...

A few weeks before the performance read the story (or review the synopsis) with your students so they can easily follow the plot.

Try not to schedule other activities on the same day as the theater event. Show students that the arts are a special and important part of his or her life. Leave the rest of the day quiet so students can discuss the performance with you. Make it something special and exciting and important.

Some children are afraid when the theater lights go out right before the performance begins. Prepare students for this and let them know it's just for a second or two and that when the lights go back on they'll be transported to a wonderful magical world.

Once the performance begins children should be courteous to their fellow audience members and not talk during the show. They will have lots of time to talk about it when the show ends. Let them know they can respond to parts they like by clapping even if it's in the middle of the show. They don't have to wait until the end to clap.



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