



Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky
(1840-1893)

Teacher's Guide

The Nutcracker Suite

PUPPET ARTS THEATRE
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ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Peter (or Piotr) Ilyitch Tchaikovsky was born on May 7, 1840 in Votkinsk, Russia. When he was five years old, he began piano lessons. As eight-year-old he entered a boarding school in Saint Petersburg. Saint Petersburg was the capital city of Russia. That's where the Tsar resided. The Tsar was like a king who ruled the country.

When Tchaikovsky was twenty-one, he entered a music school called Saint Petersburg Conservatory. He won a silver medal for his composition when he graduated four years later. He moved to Moscow, where he started to teach at the Moscow Conservatory. He composed his first opera and the first symphony when he was twenty-eight years old.

Opera is like a theatre play, but instead of speaking, people are singing. A symphony is a musical composition, a really complicated song for as many as 100 or more musical instruments. Musical instruments are violins, violas, cellos, basses, clarinets, oboes, trumpets, horns, percussions or drums, piano, harp, and many more.

All together, Tchaikovsky composed six symphonies. Most of them can be heard on the radio (you can listen to Public Radio in Mississippi (in Jackson area 91.3 FM) or in a symphony (or concert) hall. He was also inspired by works of a great English theatre play writer, William Shakespeare. Tchaikovsky composed two musical fantasies, Romeo & Juliet, and Hamlet. He composed many operas, and ballets.

Ballet is like a theatre play, but instead of speaking the actors dance to the music. Actors in a ballet are called ballet dancers or ballerinas. Tchaikovsky is famous for his ballets Sleeping Beauty, Swan Lake, and most of all, The Nutcracker. Tchaikovsky and his music became so famous that he was invited to visit many other countries in Europe, and he also came to visit United States in 1891. A year later, he composed the ballet The Nutcracker.

The classical ballet was developed by choreographers in France. Choreographers are the people who tell the dancers what kind of move they want them to do at what point in the music. Because of that the language of the ballet is French.

Tchaikovsky died in 1893, when he was 53 years old.

SUGGESTED VOCABULARY

Russia	Tsar	play writer	symphony
Europe	theatre	composer	opera
France	concert hall	choreographer	ballet

ABOUT OUR PLAY

In our show, we use puppets and objects, toys and Christmas decorations. Because they are not real dancers, we try to develop appropriate movement for the toys and puppets.

The central program for the 2022-23 season is our whimsical version of the Nutcracker Suite, set to Tchaikovsky's romantic music and the story inspired by the version of the story by Alexandre Dumas.

Here you probably say "by whom"? A little-known fact is that the ballet was actually based on Alexandre Dumas version, who took the original dark fairy-tale as the original Grimm fairy tales were by E.T.A. Hoffmann.

Alexandre Dumas created literary classics such as *The Three Musketeers* and *Count of Monte Christo*; his works have been translated into numerous languages, and he is one of France's most widely read authors. Many of his historical novels of high adventure were originally published as serials. His novels have been adapted since the early twentieth century into nearly 200 films.

Dumas simplified the story of the Nutcracker and cleaned it of the original Hoffmann's darkness. A half century later, the story inspired Tchaikovsky's world-famous ballet.

To strengthen the story, we are giving it a more traditional drama construction, from introduction to rising action to climax and resolution. Unlike the original ballet, where the climax, the war with the mice, and revealing the Nutcracker is a Prince, happens in the middle of the first act.

In our version, Clara receives the gift of the Nutcracker, and she is so taken by it that in the middle of the night, she sneaks out and plays with him, until she falls asleep when her dream starts. The toy Nutcracker comes to life. The lights from the tree form the Sugar Plum Fairy. The Christmas tree opens up and takes Clara on a trip through the welcoming Spanish Dance. Then, under the branches of the Christmas tree, other toys and tree ornaments come to life. Those present the Arabian Dance, Chinese, and March of the Soldiers ... stuffed penguins and Snowman and Snow-woman dolls present the Grandfather's Dance. More ornaments show up in the Dance of the Flutes, stuffed Russian Bears in Trepak and Pulcinellas jump out of their boxes for the Mother Gigogne dance. To bring back Tchaikovsky's romantic music, of course, it's a bouquet of colorful flowers.

When the fun is at its highest point, there is a mouse. Not one, but many, many more. That's the moment when the toy Nutcracker enters to fight the mice. Suddenly, the King of Mice appears. He picks on the Nutcracker.

The Nutcracker almost loses the battle, but Clara takes off her shoe and hits the King on his head. The King is distracted and killed by the Nutcracker.

Everybody celebrates the event. Clara is thanked by the Nutcracker. They kiss and hug. The Nutcracker

is transformed into a prince. They dance. The prince and Clara fade into darkness.

The show features the catchiest melodies that are illustrated by puppets reminiscent of Walt Disney's movie *Fantasia*. The marching penguins, dancing Russian bears, snowmen, Pulchinellas, Chinese shoes, umbrellas, Christmas ornaments, and many more, create a whirlwind of colors to bring laughter and joy of the season to children faces.

In your show, we try to give life to these objects and have them behave in their own way. In your show, you should try the same.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR STUDENTS

Let your students listen to the music from the ballet, especially the character dances: Chocolate or Spanish Dance; Tea or Chinese Dance; Trepak or Russian Dance; and the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy. These are included in most of the recordings of any *Nutcracker Suite*. Let the kids clap, move, and dance to the music in order to become familiar with it. Children can do colorful drawings while listening to the music to express what they hear. Then tell them about proper behavior in the theatre: we do not talk to each other during the show, but we can clap and laugh and have fun watching the show.

After the show repeat the above exercises with the children and see how the theatre performance affected their perceptions.

HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN PUPPETS & A PUPPET SHOW

WAVY GARLAND

Material needed:

Two sticks, dowels or new pencils,

Cellophane (clear) tape

Half a garland (or about two feet - depending on the child's reach)

- 1) Secure the ends of the garland with the clear tape.
- 2) Wrap the clear tape tightly in the center or where you plan to cut.
- 3) Cut the garland into a needed length. If needed, secure tightly the ends with the clear tape.
- 4) Attach the garland to the sticks, dowels or pencils with the clear tape. Tape the end of the garland to the sticks - make sure the tape overlaps the garland and the stick, so the garland doesn't slide up or

down.

5) A child takes each stick into one hand and waves the garland with music. Two, three or four children can create waves, triangles, squares, or other cross each other and create stars accompanied by music.

WAVY GARLAND & STYROFOAM BALLS

Material needed:

Styrofoam ball 1 1/2" or 2"

Stick, dowel or a pencil

Glitter

For garlands see above

White glue

- 1) Stick a stick, dowel or a pencil into a Styrofoam ball, pull it out. Drop a few drops of a white glue inside and stick the stick, dowel or a pencil back in. Let it dry.
- 2) Cover the styrofoam ball LIGHTLY with a white glue, or draw a pattern, like wavy lines or dots on the ball.
- 3) Sprinkle with glitter and let it dry. After drying, shake off the unglued glitter.
- 4) Play music. Let kids create formations, then add kids with garlands, have balls hop from one garland on another and back, create formations with garlands, etc.

CHRISTMAS ORNAMENTS

Material needed:

Styrofoam balls

Pipe cleaners

White glue

Stick, dowel or pencil

Glitter

- 1) Insert stick, dowel or pencil into a styrofoam ball. See instructions above.
- 2) Dip your finger in the glue and “draw” lines around the circumference of the ball. Draw two or three, depending on the size of the ball.
- 3) While wet, sprinkle with glitter and let it dry. When the glue dries, shake off the excess glitter.
- 4) Take the pipe cleaners and form it into a zig zag line. Form it around the ball, bend ends and push them into the Styrofoam ball. Carefully remove it, and put some white glue on the bottom of the pipe cleaner. Put it back on the ball and let it dry.

5) Play music and have the children move the balls in different patterns - up and down, right/up, left/down, 1 - 3 up, 2 - 4 down, etc.

DANCING TEDDY BEARS or SNOWMAN

Materials needed:

Children can bring large stuffed teddy bears or snowman from their homes.

Team up two children per toy. One holds the toy under arms, the other holds the feet. Arms can clap and the legs can dance and kick with music. Toys can walk, jump on one foot at a time, or sit down. Arms can wave with one hand or both hands. Let the children move them to the music and work out simple choreography. Before you know it, they will produce their own show.

A SPECIAL REQUEST

If something is not clear in our instructions, please feel free to call for help: (601) 956 3414.

We would like to hear about your experiences related to our production. Please let us know what you did with your children to enjoy the play and what kind of inspiration we provided. Send us some drawings done by your children so we can share them with the Mississippi Arts Commission. Let us know how helpful this guide was. It is work in progress and you can help us make it better. Your comments are greatly appreciated. Thank you.

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