Ballet: The Nutcracker
Choreography: Marius Petipa
Composer: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

The Story

It is Christmas Eve at the Stahlbaum house, and a magnificent party is thrown with lots of guests, presents, and dancing! Everyone is excited when godfather Drosselmeyer arrives, a brilliant toymaker who is always full of surprises! The children receive wonderful presents, and Drosselmeyer astounds them with life-sized dancing dolls! But the Stahlbaum's young daughter, Clara, receives the most unique gift of all, a beautiful Nutcracker doll. After the party ends and the guests leave, the Nutcracker doll is placed under the great Christmas tree and the Stahlbaum family goes to bed. But Clara sneaks back to the Christmas tree and falls asleep there with the Nutcracker in her arms.

As the clock strikes midnight, strange and wonderful things happen! Clara begins to shrink, the Christmas tree growing taller and taller! The toys around the tree all come to life, and the room is filled with an army of mice, led by the fierce Mouse King! The Nutcracker awakens and leads an army of toy soldiers to battle the mice. He is cornered by the Mouse King, and just when it seems he might lose to the ferocious rodent, Clara throws her slipper at the Mouse King and hits him square in the head! The Mouse King drops down dead, and his army of mice carries him away.

The Nutcracker then turns into a Prince! Grateful to Clara for saving his life, he leads her into the Land of Snow, where they are welcomed by dancing snowflakes. The Prince then escorts Clara into the magical Land of Sweets where they are greeted by the beautiful Sugar Plum Fairy. He describes their daring battle with the mice and she rewards them with a grand celebration! Various sweets and treats from around the world dance for Clara and her Prince, including chocolate, tea, coffee, peppermint, and marzipan. Flowers and Dewdrop then perform a beautiful waltz for Clara and the Prince. At the close of the celebration, the Sugar Plum Fairy herself dances for them with her Cavalier.

Slowly, this magical land begins to fade as the Sugar Plum Fairy's dance ends, and Clara awakens by the Christmas tree to find it was all just a wonderful dream, the Nutcracker doll in her arms.

The History

The Nutcracker was originally a book by E. T. A. Hoffman that was adapted by famous French author Alexandre Dumas. Inspired by Dumas' version of the story, Marius Petipa choreographed it as a ballet, commissioning Pyotr Tchaikovsky to compose the music. It was first performed in December 1892, in the Mariinsky Theater of St. Petersburg, Russia. While Pyotr's music was praised for its enchanting and creative sounds, the ballet itself was met with mixed reviews and was not a big hit. Various choreographers staged their own adaptations of the ballet over the next several

decades, but The Nutcracker was not a success until the San Francisco Ballet presented the Nutcracker to its audience in December 1944. It became a hit in New York City when famous ballerina Maria Tallchief danced as the Sugar Plum Fairy in 1954, and after that The Nutcracker became widely famous and loved through many performances around the world in the 1960s. While Pyotr Tchaikovsky did not live to see his ballet become famous, the Nutcracker is now one of the most popular and beloved ballets in the world! Many ballet companies perform this enchanting story every year.

Varvara Nikitina as the Sugar Plum Fairy and Pavel Gerdt as the Cavalier in a performance of *The Nutcracker*, 1892