



ROYAL
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The Nutcracker

An Introduction

A Royal Opera House Education Resource

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Introduction

This pack is prepared for pupils from Key Stage 2 upwards, and most of the material is aimed at Key Stages 2 and 3. However, the approach adopted is equally appropriate to older students and the list of 'Things to do and discuss' contains tasks to challenge all, including 'A' level students. The teacher is invited to select and/or adapt according to the needs of the situation.

Pupils attending a live performance of the ballet should be familiar with the story and, ideally, should be introduced to a number of 'anchor points' - features to notice and moments to listen for.

For convenience, tasks and activities are often grouped around a specific art form, but it is important to stress that ballet involves several art forms. Listening without the visual dimension, or focusing on design elements independently of the music and the dance, are valuable approaches in raising pupils' awareness but they should be regarded as means to an end. In ballet the whole is much more than the sum of the parts.

To make most effective use of this pack it may well be necessary to copy and disseminate the material among specialist or other teacher colleagues.

The Characters

The principal characters:

Herr Drosselmeyer

Clara - Drosselmeyer's goddaughter

The Nutcracker - Drosselmeyer's nephew

Dr & Mrs Stahlbaum - Clara's parents

Fritz - Clara's brother

The Mouse King

The Sugar Plum Fairy

The Prince

Other characters include: Drosselmeyer's assistant, the Angel, the housekeeper, Clara's grandparents, the mechanical dolls, the St Nicholas revellers, the Rose Fairy, and the dancers in the Act II divertissement.

In addition there are: Aunts, uncles, parents, children, toy soldiers, mice, angels, snowflakes, revellers, maids, manservants and pages.

Setting the scene

Act I

- Scene 1 Drosselmeyer's workshop
- Scene 2 Street outside the Stahlbaums' house
- Scene 3 The Stahlbaums' living room
- Scene 4 The battle
- Scene 5 The Land of Snow

Act II

- Scene 1 The journey to the Kingdom of Sweets
- Scene 2 The Palace Garden
- Scene 3 Street outside the Stahlbaums' house
- Scene 4 Drosselmeyer's workshop

The Story

The story is set in Nuremberg, Germany, sometime around the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Act I

It is Christmas Eve. In his workshop Drosselmeyer, a magician and creator of mechanical dolls and clocks, is putting the finishing touches to a Christmas Angel which will decorate the top of the Christmas tree in the home of his friends, Dr and Mrs Stahlbaum. The Stahlbaums have two children, Clara and Fritz, and Drosselmeyer is the godfather of Clara. As a friend of the family, he has been invited to their Christmas party and has agreed to entertain the guests with his magic.

Drosselmeyer sends his assistant ahead to be sure that the Angel is delivered in good time. The Angel is particularly important to him. He believes it will guide and protect Clara through the special task he has planned for her - that is, to break the spell that has transformed his nephew into an ugly Nutcracker doll.

Left alone in his workshop, Drosselmeyer takes down the Nutcracker from the mantel shelf where it rests beneath a portrait of his long-lost, handsome nephew. For a moment he pauses in front of the portrait, as if recalling the terrible instant when the transformation took place. Then he wraps the Nutcracker in his scarf, puts on his hat and coat, blows out the candle, and leaves for the party.

Outside the Stahlbaums' house we see guests arriving - children, aunts, uncles and other guests. These include Drosselmeyer's assistant, whose

unusual appearance causes the housekeeper to have doubts about letting him in.

In the living room of the house, Clara and Fritz are already receiving presents from relatives and friends. Their grandma and grandpa enter and give Fritz a box of toy soldiers and Clara a sewing basket.

The housekeeper rushes in to tell Mrs Stahlbaum about the strange guest she has allowed in. Before the housekeeper can finish her story Drosselmeyer's assistant bursts in and presents Mrs Stahlbaum with a box containing the Angel. She is delighted and shows the Angel to her guests. The assistant tells her that it must be placed on top of the tree.

Drosselmeyer arrives. The housekeeper takes his hat and coat, and he is made welcome by Dr and Mrs Stahlbaum. He greets various other guests and is especially pleased to see Clara, whom he touches gently on the cheek. Drosselmeyer and his assistant go into the next room to prepare the entertainment. As he passes the tree he gestures to the Angel, which lights up.

More excited children and their parents arrive and are welcomed. As soon as everyone has assembled Dr Stahlbaum instructs the servants to light the tree. It is time for the party to begin.

For a moment, a real Christmas Angel appears in front of the Christmas tree and beckons to Clara. Clara runs to her mother to tell her, but the Angel has vanished. It was seen only by Clara.

The party continues as normal and Dr Stahlbaum gives each child a Christmas present. The children are delighted and join together in a dance as the adults look on. St Nicholas revellers who are passing by call in and add to the merrymaking.

The adults then perform their own dance, but it is brought to an abrupt end by Drosselmeyer's assistant who announces that the entertainment is about to begin.

The lights go down, and Drosselmeyer appears amid a burst of glittering snow. He bows to the children. They are a little afraid of this strange man, but they become fascinated by his various tricks of magic.

Drosselmeyer calls to the servants to bring in two large containers, one shaped like the head of a cauliflower and the other resembling a pie. The children gather around, curious to see what is inside. When the cauliflower and the pie break open two life-size mechanical dolls, Harlequin and Columbine, unfold and dance as Drosselmeyer instructs them to.

Two more boxes are brought in. Inside one is a mechanical soldier, and inside the other is the soldier's lady friend, Vivandière. They, too, perform a dance before being returned to their boxes and taken away.

With a further act of magic Drosselmeyer provides a special cake, the Sugar Garden Cake, which has on it figures of the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Prince. As everyone gathers to receive their slice of the cake Drosselmeyer steps aside and calls Clara to him. He produces the Nutcracker and gives it to her.

Clara is thrilled with her present, but Fritz is jealous. As Clara dances with joy Fritz makes several attempts to snatch the Nutcracker from her, and eventually he succeeds. Clara chases Fritz to get her present back from him. The Nutcracker falls to the ground and is broken.

Drosselmeyer bandages the broken Nutcracker with a handkerchief and returns it to Clara. He then leaves the party, accompanied by his assistant.

Watched by her friends, Clara lovingly lays the Nutcracker in her doll's bed and places the bed inside the dolls' house where the Nutcracker will be safe from any further harm.

The time is now getting late and Dr Stahlbaum asks grandpa and grandma to start the final dance. Everyone joins in, including the servants and the children. When the dance ends, the guests thank Dr and Mrs Stahlbaum for an enjoyable evening and leave.

As the family make their way to bed, Clara takes one last peep to wish her Nutcracker goodnight.

The living room is now in darkness except for a beam of moonlight shining through the window. Gradually the light becomes mysterious and magical. The tree starts to glimmer, and the toy fort and the dolls' house light up.

The Angel re-appears and beckons to Clara who runs downstairs in her nightdress, carrying a candle. Clara is looking for the Nutcracker. Just as she takes the Nutcracker from the dolls' house, the Harlequin doll jumps out from behind. He startles Clara and chases her across the room. There her path is blocked by Columbine who chases her around the room.

The owl clock starts to strike midnight, and as it does so it revolves and reveals Drosselmeyer on the other side. Clara is terrified and again she tries to escape. But, whichever way she turns, her way is blocked by one of the mechanical dolls, until Drosselmeyer comes to her assistance.

But stranger things still begin to happen. In response to Drosselmeyer's magical powers the Christmas tree grows and grows until it is an enormous size, decorated with brightly shining lights. Beneath the tree the toy soldiers come to life and, most amazing of all, the Nutcracker is transformed into a handsome boy, who is about the same age as Clara.

When Drosselmeyer leaves, mice - unfriendly mice, in large numbers - suddenly appear. They are led by the King Mouse. The Nutcracker leads the toy soldiers into battle against the mice and a tense struggle takes place. Eventually, the Nutcracker and the King Mouse fight each other and, when the Nutcracker's life is in danger, Clara removes her shoe and strikes the King Mouse from behind. The Nutcracker's life is saved and the King Mouse is defeated. The Angel briefly re-appears.

In Clara's eyes the Nutcracker is a hero. He is her Prince Charming. In return, the Nutcracker sees Clara as the beautiful young maiden who saved his life. She is his Princess. They dance.

The scene changes as the Angel leads them to the Land of Snow. It is the first stage of a magical journey. Snowflakes sparkle in the moonlight, and spin and swirl in the gusty breeze.

Drosselmeyer re-appears and invites Clara and the Nutcracker to take their seats on a sleigh which will carry them to the Kingdom of Sweets.

Act II

As the journey continues, Clara and the Nutcracker are accompanied by angels who guide them safely to their destination. Outside the beautiful palace of the Kingdom of Sweets they are met by four pages.

In the garden of the palace, known as the Sugar Garden, we see the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Prince, the Rose Fairy and several other attendant fairies. When Drosselmeyer enters everyone bows to him. He tells them that he has brought along Clara and the Nutcracker and they must all dance to entertain their guests. The four pages enter down steps leading into the Garden, followed by Clara and the Nutcracker. Drosselmeyer introduces them to the Sugar Plum Fairy and the Prince, and to the Rose Fairy.

Using mime, the Nutcracker describes the adventures he and Clara experienced in the battle with the mice, and how his life was saved by Clara when she struck the King Mouse with her shoe. He dances with Clara to express his gratitude to her.

The Sugar Plum Fairy listens attentively to their amazing story and welcomes them to the Kingdom as important guests of honour. Drosselmeyer brings out a necklace and a medal which he gives to the Sugar Plum Fairy to present to Clara and the Nutcracker.

Drosselmeyer now asks everyone to clear a dancing space so that the entertainment can begin.

First, dancers wearing Spanish costume perform a lively Spanish-style dance. It is followed by an Arab dance in which the slower tempo, the quiet, secretive mood and the silky, flowing body movements contrast

with the crispness of the Spanish dance. Then 'Chinese' dancers spring like jack-in-the-boxes and swirl around with the lightness of marionettes or, at other times, shuffle along busily while fanning themselves.

The Trepak is an energetic and acrobatic Russian dance which gets faster and faster as it approaches a rousing and abrupt climax. The Dance of the Mirlitons (who are delicate marzipan shepherdesses) is as light and dainty as its name suggests. The gentle, feminine mood contrasts with the masculine vigour of the trepak.

The Dance of the Mirlitons is followed by the Waltz of the Flowers, which has long, sweeping, graceful phrases compared with the dainty, staccato movements of the previous dance. The Waltz is performed by the Rose Fairy and eight other 'flowers'.

Often Clara and the Nutcracker join in with the dancers.

The entertainment reaches its climax when the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Prince perform a splendid pas de deux which is both graceful and exciting. The entire cast assembles for a grand finale.

When the finale ends Drosselmeyer re-appears at the top of the steps which lead down to the Garden. As he descends the light gradually fades and he signals to everyone to leave - all, that is, except Clara, whom he lifts onto his shoulder. Tired and exhausted by all that has happened, Clara falls asleep in Drosselmeyer's arms.

The light dims even further and the scene changes. We recognise the owl clock in the Stahlbaums' living room. Drosselmeyer gently places the sleeping Clara at the foot of the clock and disappears into the darkness.

Clara awakens and looks around for Drosselmeyer. When she discovers he is not there, she runs off in search of him.

Outside, the snow is falling gently. As Clara rushes out into the street, Drosselmeyer's nephew crosses from the opposite side, looking for his uncle's workshop. They pass each other. Then, seeing Clara is in her nightdress, he takes off his cloak and puts it around her shoulders. He shows her the address he is looking for, and she points the direction.

For a moment they look at each other, as if recognising one another. Then they go their separate ways. He rushes off to his uncle's workshop. She slowly returns to the house, and discovers the necklace is still around her neck.

In his workshop Drosselmeyer has fallen asleep at his worktable. There is a knock at the door. Drosselmeyer's nephew enters and wakes his uncle. They embrace. As Drosselmeyer looks towards the portrait above the mantel shelf, he seems to see the ugly mask of the Nutcracker being removed from his nephew's face. The final moments show uncle and nephew looking with great satisfaction at the portrait of the handsome young boy.

Away from this scene we see an image of Clara - a reminder that without her help the spell would not have been broken.

Petipa and Ivanov

The outstanding reputation of the Russian Imperial Ballet in the second half of the nineteenth century owed a great deal to the inspirational leadership of its ballet master, Marius Petipa (1818-1910). Petipa arrived in Russia from France in 1847 to join the Imperial Ballet as a dancer. He was appointed ballet master in 1869 and remained in post until 1903. During this time he produced more than 60 ballets, including *Don Quixote* (1869), *La Bayadère* (1877) and *Raymonda* (1898), as well as the three ballets in which he collaborated with the great Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky: *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890), *The Nutcracker* (1892) and *Swan Lake* (1895).

Petipa prepared the libretto (the storyline) and scenario (the description of the dances required to match the story) for each of the Tchaikovsky ballets. But when choreographing the ballets (creating the dances), he received valuable help from his assistant, Lev Ivanov (1834-1901). Indeed, almost the whole of *The Nutcracker* and two of the four acts of *Swan Lake* were choreographed by Ivanov.

Ivanov joined the Imperial Ballet in 1852 and became principal dancer in 1869. He was appointed rehearsal director in 1882 and became second ballet master three years later. During his lifetime, the quiet and retiring Ivanov worked in the shadow of his master and seldom received the recognition he deserved. He died in poverty.

Ivanov's choreography of *The Nutcracker* has provided the basis for the present production, although Peter Wright has inevitably omitted, changed and added passages to meet the needs of the revised storyline.

The Nutcracker: past and present

The Nutcracker is probably the most frequently performed of the great classical ballets and is an especial favourite with family audiences around Christmas time.

And yet, when it was first performed at the Maryinsky Theatre in St Petersburg on 6th December 1892, the reviews were far from enthusiastic. One critic wrote, '*The Nutcracker* provided nothing other than boredom to the public, and many left the theatre before the end of the performance'.

Not surprisingly, for many years the ballet was rarely performed, and was not performed at the famous Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow until 27 years after its premiere in St Petersburg. Its first performance in London took place at Sadler's Wells in 1934.

So, why was the work not popular with audiences? The main reason is summed up by one contemporary critic who complained, 'In *The Nutcracker* there is no subject whatever'.

Certainly it is true that the libretto which accompanied the 1892 production made no attempt to explain the fantastic happenings in the ballet. As a result, *The Nutcracker* seemed to comprise two more or less unrelated halves: a first act filled with story and action, and a second act of pure entertainment, divertissements, and very little drama.

Robert Wiley has written, 'The audience is left at the final curtain asking what the point of the piece was, and what more it must know for the story to make sense'.

The lack of clear dramatic shape and coherent storyline in the original production has challenged subsequent producers and choreographers to create their own plausible and dramatically satisfying links between the two acts.

The most frequently used solution has been a final scene showing Clara waking from a dream. On occasions this idea has been developed a stage further so that the divertissements in Act II do not take place in the Kingdom of Sweets but in Clara's own room. The dances are then performed by Clara's dolls who have come to life.

In some productions the children are played by small adults. This 'permits' them to fall in love when the Nutcracker is transformed into a boy prince, and allows their love to flourish as the ballet unfolds. In this interpretation the parts of the Sugar Plum Fairy and the Prince are omitted and the Grand pas de deux is danced by Clara and the Nutcracker.

Several productions have explored Clara's 'rite of passage' into womanhood. In some, an adolescent Clara fantasises about dancing with a young, debonair Drosselmeyer. In others, Drosselmeyer's own fantasy reveals him to be in love with his goddaughter.

For the present production of *The Nutcracker*, Peter Wright has chosen not to follow any of these routes. Instead he has returned for guidance to E T A Hoffmann's *Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, the story upon which the ballet was initially based.

In an earlier programme note Wright explained:

‘The story is about Drosselmeyer, a magical clockmaker and creator of mechanical toys. When he was employed in a royal palace he invented a trap that killed off half the mouse population. In revenge the wicked Queen of the Mice cast a spell over Drosselmeyer’s nephew and transformed him into an ugly Nutcracker doll. The only way to break the spell was for the Nutcracker to slay the Mouse King, thereby committing an act of great bravery, and for a young girl to love and care for him in spite of his awful appearance’.

This production, then, is about what happened next. It is the continuation of the story, with Drosselmeyer the magician as the dominant character - the manipulator and controller of events.

When the curtain rises Drosselmeyer is the first person we see - putting the finishing touches to a Christmas Angel he has made. He believes the Angel will help guide Clara through the great task he has planned for her, that is, to break the spell cast on his nephew. Even in the Kingdom of Sweets everyone bows to Drosselmeyer, including the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Prince. It is Drosselmeyer’s Kingdom. And, of course, at the end, the magician and his nephew are reunited. His plans have been successful.

For Peter Wright, Drosselmeyer is the thread pulling all of the elements of the ballet together, including the seemingly disparate Act I and II. The fantastic events of the story are formed by Drosselmeyer’s imagination, not in Clara’s dream.

What was expected of a ballet composer?

Tchaikovsky was the first great composer to write music for a ballet. In general, writing ballet music had been regarded as a task better suited to the talents of specialist composers who seldom wrote symphonies, concertos and music for the concert hall. These composers worked strictly to the instructions of a ballet master; adding to, taking out and re-arranging their compositions according to his requirements. Not infrequently ballet scores (compositions) were still being changed until shortly before the first performance. Without question, being a ballet composer was considered by serious musicians to be an inferior occupation. Tchaikovsky, therefore, was risking his growing reputation when he decided to compose the music for *Swan Lake*, his first ballet (choreography: Reisinger 1877)

Composing for ballet introduced a range of constraints and expectations Tchaikovsky had not previously had to consider. First, it was necessary to agree with the choreographer a detailed scenario, that is, the manner in which the story for the ballet would be broken down into a sequence of short dances. Each dance would then need to be discussed further to determine its purpose, its mood and for whom it was intended. Second, the dances would have to fit into an established plan for such ballets, within which not only would the story be told, but also an appropriate range of opportunities would be created for dancers to display their skills, both technical and expressive.

There were other points too. Ballet is, above all, a visual experience and the music should not distract the audience. Rather it should reflect the quality of movement and should support both the outward expression and the inner feelings of the dancer. In mid- nineteenth century Russia,

when Tchaikovsky was composing, considerable importance was attached to providing melodious music which could be easily remembered by the dancers (as well as by the audience) and within which 'sign-posts' indicating changes of movement could be easily identified. Finally, dancing was, then as now, a very demanding activity and it was necessary for composers to provide sufficient 'breathing spaces' both between and during dances.

Not only was Tchaikovsky successful in matching the requirements of ballet as an art form, he raised ballet music to new heights and in so doing encouraged other 'serious' composers to follow his example.

Dance: Look for ...

The Nutcracker contains a range of dance styles and steps. The following points will guide pupils towards key choreographic moments within the ballet and help them to analyse the choreographic content. Aspects to consider are the range of different movements and the qualities with which they are performed, the way the space is used and the relationships between different characters.

Time spent studying these points in advance will offer pupils the chance to acquire a more informed and in-depth appreciation and understanding of the choreography and what is being expressed, during the actual performance.

Act I

After the children have received their presents, they dance together. There are lots of different travelling steps (including skips, the polka step [steps on the first three half beats and a hop on the fourth] and jumps) and the children trace a variety of floor patterns, moving about the space freely. What do these aspects of the choreography tell us about the children's mood and their feelings?

The children's dance is to the music of a Gallop which is a recognised dance form in its own right. Another traditional dance form is used as the basis for the guests' dance which follows the arrival of St Nicholas at the party. It is in the style of a well-known ballroom dance that was particularly popular in nineteenth century Russia.

Drosselmeyer is a very important character in the ballet. Although he does very little 'real' dancing, the quality of his movements, his posture and the gestures he uses help to build up a picture of the type of person he is.

Notice the quality of the dances performed by Harlequin, Columbine, the Soldier and Vivandière. They do not dance with smooth, fluent movements but are jerky and stiff. This helps to identify them as mechanical dolls.

When Clara dances with the Nutcracker doll there is a sense of pleasure and excitement. Holding it tightly she spins, lifts the doll up high and then hugs it close to her chest. This is followed by a tender dance to a lullaby in which she and the other girls at the party rock their dolls with slow, sustained movements. This is interrupted by the boys with their boisterous activity and loud instruments.

The party ends with one further traditional dance. It is started by Clara's grandparents with ultimately everyone else joining in. Notice the slow, stately and dignified quality at the start of the dance and how it progresses to be a much livelier dance.

When the Angel summons Clara from her bed, she runs downstairs and looks for her Nutcracker doll. Look for all the different characters who chase Clara about the stage in her search for the doll. From where does each character appear?

In the battle between the toy soldiers and the mice, compare the different ways the two opposing groups move. The soldiers are very regimented, as one might expect. They move along straight pathways, travelling mainly with marching steps and with a very upright body position. They move with a strong, rhythmic quality. In contrast the

mice travel along a weaving pathway, constantly changing direction and levels as they travel. They are also more spread out in small groups whereas the soldiers begin the battle in one large group. The mice have a greater variety of steps to perform.

Look for ways in which the choreographer has used the space, and the relationships between the two groups to give information about the occurring conflict. For example, the use of circles to surround and close in on a group, the way the opposing groups face one another and the distance between them.

Where, during the battle, does the fight between the Nutcracker and the King Mouse occur? Why do you think the choreographer has placed it at this point? Is there anything else happening at the same time?

After the Mouse King has been defeated, Clara and the Nutcracker (brought to life in the Transformation scene) dance together. It is a joyful pas de deux, expressing their admiration for each other.

The choreography for the Waltz of the Snowflakes captures the image of lightly falling snow very clearly. The dancers spin and swirl representing flurries of snow, moving with a very delicate quality. Their arm movements are especially light. They are arranged in a variety of formations which suggest the individual geometry of single snowflakes, with lines of dancers moving in opposite directions to create a sparkling, shimmering effect.

Act II

In the Angels' Candle Dance at the start of this act, notice how the angels move very slowly, using mainly the upper part of their bodies in a series of gestures and turns. The costumes are quite bulky and heavy

and therefore restrict the dancers' movements. Where are we supposed to believe this dance is taking place? How is this effect achieved?

When Clara and the Nephew arrive in the Sugar Garden, he uses mime to describe their adventures. Most of the gestures he uses are easily 'readable'. Some are slightly more difficult: for example, look out for gestures to describe how he was sleeping when he awoke to hear the sound of a shot from a gun; the gesture to describe the mice (fingers wiggling in front of the mouth) and the Mouse King (the side of one hand, fingers pointing upwards, touching each side of the forehead).

Compare the choreography of the different divertissement (entertainment) dances. The first four dances are stylised; they are not the true National dances of the named country, but it is rather that certain aspects have been drawn upon and exaggerated in choreographing the new dance.

Spanish

The Spanish dancers perform sudden, sharp movements with flicks of the head and hands, which are then contrasted with more fluent, swinging movements. The dancers have flexed wrists and the upper body tilts in different directions. It is performed to lively accompaniment. All of these aspects help to give a strong Spanish style.

Arabian

The fluidity of the Arabian dance is a great contrast to the crispness of the Spanish number. The movements are slow and sustained, matching the slower tempo of the music. Notice the shape of the body with arms bent at the elbow and also at the wrists.

Chinese

There is a playful element to the Chinese dance including supported jumps and dancers leaping over one another. Throughout the dance, upward movements are contrasted with busy shuffling steps across the floor.

Trepak

The two Trepak dancers move in an increasingly fast, energetic manner. Stylistic features include the use of the heel and jumping high to land low, in a crouch position.

The Dance of the Mirlitons and the Waltz of the Flowers are both classical in style. Notice the clean, straight lines of the dancers' bodies and how the upper body remains very upright whilst the legs work very hard beneath. Watch out also for the different symmetrical arrangements of the dancers. The Mirlitons have a dainty, staccato quality compared with the graceful, sweeping movements of the waltzing flowers.

The Grand pas de deux, performed by the Sugar Plum Fairy and the Prince, is very classical. Notice how Drosselmeyer sends everyone away to the edges of the stage in order to give a clear dancing space for the

two dancers. The Sugar Plum Fairy and the Prince are very important roles, usually danced by principal dancers, and all the other characters on stage stop and watch. Their pas de deux is near the end of the scene thus giving the impression that all of the previous divertissement dances have been building towards this climax.

Each dancer has a grand entrance; the Sugar Plum Fairy appears at the top of the steps and waits whilst the Prince enters, he circles the stage area and then helps her descend the steps. These two dancers have spectacular steps - many difficult balances, turns and lifts - and distinctive costumes. As with all classical pas de deux, they dance together first of all, then each dancer has a short solo, giving opportunity to display their individual technical skills, before they come together again to dance. This dance at the end of a pas de deux is known as a coda.

The Prince's solo is high-energy and he covers the whole stage space with bounding leaps and complex turns. In contrast to this quality, the Sugar Plum Fairy's solo is light and delicate. It is also quite contained in terms of the space used; she does not move far across the stage at all. However, her solo is also full of difficult movements.

The pas de deux finishes in a fish dive - a spectacular final position for a classical pas de deux in which the Prince holds the ballerina almost vertically upside down as she dives towards the floor.

Listen to ...

Introducing the music

Pupils' enjoyment of *The Nutcracker* will be greatly enhanced through familiarity with selected aspects of the music. Time spent in preparation creates opportunities to focus on a range of features, and to raise awareness of their significance in the context of the ballet.

Areas for study might include, for example:

- the use of music to create atmosphere or mood - as in the overture, the battle scene, the Land of Snow and the journey to the Kingdom of Sweets etc;
- the use of music to reflect character - such as the music associated with Drosselmeyer, contrasted with the music for the Sugar Plum Fairy. Also, music can be used to express the feelings characters have for each other - as between Clara and the Nutcracker, following the battle scene;
- the use of existing dance forms, both during the Christmas party and during the divertissements in the Kingdom of Sweets;
- the music composed for dance solos or duets, when often the style is intimate, the texture is light, and the use of instrumental colour is selective and sensitive. Tchaikovsky was a supreme colourist and his use of solo wood-wind instruments, the harp, the celesta and the human voice (used as an orchestral instrument) are very important features of the score.

Listen to ...

The Overture

The Overture is bright, lively and playful. It suggests a buzz of excitement as everyone looks forward to the Christmas party.

The opening is quiet - almost as if we have crept up secretly to sneak a peep at the preparations in progress. When the tune is repeated it is answered with busy figures played first by the flute and then by the clarinet. Gradually more instruments join in and the volume increases, but still the music is bright and cheerful. There are no deep, dark sounding instruments to disturb the mood.

1. A very brief trumpet fanfare, almost as if played on a toy trumpet, introduces a contrasting tune played by the strings. The smooth, sweeping phrases of this melody contrast with the staccato rhythm of the opening. It is accompanied by other string instruments playing pizzicato (plucked) chords.
2. The curtain rises half way through the overture to reveal Drosselmeyer in his workshop.

Act I

3. The March music accompanies the children as they approach Dr Stahlbaum, in pairs, to receive their presents. It is a comparatively formal little ceremony, which is no doubt why the composer thought march-like music would be appropriate. When the present giving has been completed the children join together and

dance to the same music. The opening is played softly, but very rhythmically, by the instruments of the brass family. The strings reply with their own skipping tune. In a contrasting middle section, a rapid, breezy melody played staccato, is passed between the flutes and the strings. The opening music then returns.

4. The March is followed by a further dance for the children, the Gallop. A gallop is a recognised dance form with a lively tempo and characteristic rhythm pattern.
5. Like the gallop, the parents' dance is in the style of a well-known ballroom dance which would be familiar to audiences in nineteenth century Russia. The party is now in full swing. Parents and children alike are enjoying the mood of the occasion.

However, the dancing is ended abruptly by an announcement from Drosselmeyer's assistant that the entertainment is about to begin.

6. The music accompanying the magician's appearance is at first mysterious suggesting that the children are a little unsure what to think about this strange man - but then it becomes dark and disturbing. Maybe there is a sinister and frightening streak in Drosselmeyer's character.

To create this dramatic characterisation the composer uses the lower woodwind (bassoon and cor anglais) and brass instruments (trombones and tuba) to play staccato, accented notes, arranged in short, descending rhythmic phrases which jab and splutter, and then stop. Above, there is the long, sustained sound of a muted horn.

Earlier, when Drosselmeyer first arrived at the party, dark orchestral colours and agitated rhythmic figures hinted that here was a man with unusual powers.

7. Clara's dance after she has received the Nutcracker as a present from Drosselmeyer is a delightful, happy tune played by the violins. But notice how the tempo becomes quicker and tension is created in the music by adding woodwind and brass leading to the dramatic moment when the Nutcracker falls to the ground - and there is a brief, but tense, silence.

A little later the music captures well the contrast between the boisterous, teasing behaviour of the boys, and the gentle, sympathetic understanding Clara receives from the girls.

8. The party ends with one further 'traditional' dance - known as the Grandfathers' Dance - performed by the adults. The opening of the dance is dignified and stately in tempo and style. The contrasting section is lively and very fast. Both sections are repeated.
9. The music for the battle between the toy soldiers and the mice is created against a strong march-like pulse. To represent the toy soldiers the composer selects military sounds - such as trumpet fanfares, drums, and urgent, fluttering figures played by the piccolo. The mice are mostly represented by darker orchestral colours - such as the sounds made by the lower woodwind and brass instruments. The music portrays the intense activity of the struggle between the opposing groups. It builds up in waves of sound, with increasing momentum, until the final climax is reached.

10. Clara's admiration and affection for her hero is expressed in a beautiful, sustained melody, played first by the strings and the horns accompanied by the harp. The Nutcracker feels similarly attracted to Clara, and the tune is taken up by the full orchestra before the pair begin their magical journey.

11. The journey takes them through the Land of Snow, where the Waltz of the Snowflakes takes place. How, in orchestral sound, could Tchaikovsky suggest flurries of snowflakes? One effect he chose was the use of light, wispy figures, played alternately by flutes and violins, as if they are in conversation. Notice how the composer uses texture, pitch, dynamics and timbre to create this musical representation of a winter landscape.

12. Tchaikovsky was always extremely careful to select orchestral colours which matched the effect he wished to achieve, and occasionally he introduced unexpected sounds. For example, as the waltz develops and the journey continues, the wafting sound of distant voices suggests the hidden presence of a heavenly choir. It is a magical touch.

Act II

13. A smooth, gliding melody, played first by the strings above a swirling harp accompaniment, suggests a feeling of effortlessly floating through the clouds. When, after a short contrasting section, the tune is repeated, the orchestral texture is thicker and the melody is punctuated by rapid, ascending scalar figures played by flutes and piccolos. The lower strings and woodwind instruments provide a gently pulsating accompaniment, but the gliding motion is still present in the long, smooth phrases of the melody.

As the sleigh approaches the palace of the Kingdom of Sweets the volume and texture increase still further and create a mood of excitement and expectancy. Then, in complete contrast, a particularly beautiful, musical box interpretation of the theme, using the silvery qualities of the celesta, accompanies the first appearance of the Sugar Plum Fairy.

The first three dances of the divertissement (the entertainment) are named after beverages: chocolate, coffee and tea.

14. Chocolate

The opening tune of this lively 'Spanish' dance is played by a solo trumpet. When the tune is repeated the distinctive sound of the piccolo adds further brilliance and sparkle.

15. In contrast, a smoother and more graceful melody, introduced by the strings, provides the musical material for the second half of the dance.

16. Coffee

The 'mystery of the orient' is suggested by the hushed, repeated rhythm of the drone accompaniment and the drooping, reedy tones of the clarinet. Above the recurring pattern of the drone accompaniment, the main melody, played by the violins, is spun like a continuous silk thread. From time to time, other woodwind instruments - especially the oboe and the cor anglais - add to the eastern flavour.

17. Tea

This high, chirpy tune is played by the piccolo, answered by the violins playing pizzicato. The accompaniment is provided by the deep, staccato notes of the bassoons playing three or, sometimes, four octaves below. The same bass note is repeated throughout. In the last section, rapid arpeggio figures, played by the clarinets, add variation to the accompaniment as the dance reaches its final climax.

18. Trepak

The Trepak is a very energetic and 'masculine' dance with a strong, driving beat, and a characteristic rhythmic pattern which is maintained throughout. It is a feature of a trepak that the final bars get faster and faster, leading to an abrupt end and leaving the dancers quite breathless!

19. Dance of the Mirlitons

The delicate character of this dance is produced by flutes, playing staccato, above a lightly treading pizzicato accompaniment. Indeed, except for the accompaniment figure, the woodwind instruments dominate the first section. They are joined later by the strings, when the tune is repeated. A contrasting middle section is provided by the brass family. Even so, the lightness of style and character is retained. A repetition of the opening section brings the dance to its close.

20. Waltz of the Flowers

The harp is particularly prominent during the introduction to the Waltz. Its rippling, cascading arpeggio figures suggest an atmosphere of calm and graceful elegance. The opening of the main tune is played by the horns. The clarinets respond with playful phrases - as if they are pleased to accept the invitation to dance - and the horn tune is then repeated. This 'musical paragraph' is heard several times during the course of the dance. Contrasting sections are introduced - that is, sections which introduce new tunes and contrasting instrumental colour - but always the music returns to the opening section, giving the dance a distinct sense of form and shape.

21. Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy

The climax of the entertainment is the pas de deux danced by the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Prince. The pas de deux provides opportunity for the dancers to perform separately as well as together. The music now popularly known as 'The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy' was composed for the Sugar Plum Fairy's solo dance.

The delicate and dainty tune with which the dance begins is played by the celesta above a pizzicato accompaniment. Rapid, descending scale figures played by the clarinet, provide links between the phrases. Other solo woodwind instruments are used for contrasting sections between repetitions of the main tune. The dance ends with a fast passage, which creates an opportunity for the ballerina to display both technical and expressive skills. The celesta was a comparatively recent invention when Tchaikovsky was composing the music for *The Nutcracker*, and it had not previously been used in Russia. The composer had first heard the instrument in Paris. Writing to a friend, he described it as 'something between a small piano and a glockenspiel, with a divinely marvellous sound'. He asked that the theatre where *The Nutcracker* was to be performed should buy a celesta, but that it should be kept secret. He wanted to surprise the audience and was afraid that other composers might use it first.

Petipa's instructions relating to the Sugar Plum Fairy's variation, called for music expressing 'the sound of the sprays of a fountain'. The celesta was perfectly suited to the task.

Design: Look for ...

Ballet is meant to be seen. However interesting and exciting the music is, it only provides one part of an art form that has three components: dance, music and design. It is the designer's responsibility to create the space (the environment) in which the dancers perform and to design the costumes they wear. The choreographer and designer must work closely so that each understands what the other is trying to achieve.

Staging

- How realistic are the scenes? Has the designer attempted to imitate everyday life in detail, or are a few carefully selected images used to create a sense of place and time?
- Has the designer chosen to use more than one level in any of the scenes? If so, what action takes place above the main stage level?
- Do all of the scenes use the full stage?
- What visual clues are there to indicate the time of year? And the time of day/night?
- What is unusual about the clock in the Stahlbaums' living room?
- What design effects are used to suggest Clara and the Nutcracker's journey to the Kingdom of Sweets?

The ballet requires a range of very different scenes: a peep into Drosselmeyer's workshop; a street scene in the evening; the Stahlbaums' living room; the journey/the Land of Snow; outside the palace in the Kingdom of Sweets; the Sugar Garden. How does the designer manage the changes between scenes without disrupting the flow of the performance with lengthy pauses?

- Are any scenes, or parts of scenes, used more than once?
- How does the designer use colour to help create atmosphere? For example, what differences do you notice between the colours used for the Stahlbaums' Christmas party, and those used for the fantasy entertainment in the Sugar Garden?
- How can we tell when we are in the 'real' world and when we are in the 'fantasy' world?
- What differences in overall lighting levels do you notice between the various scenes? Is the light always the same colour? For example, what colour lighting is used in the Land of Snow?
- How does the lighting designer enable us to see what is happening at night in the Stahlbaums' living room? How does this lighting compare with the street scenes?
- Is the lighting used to cast shadows at any point? Are the shadows used for dramatic purposes - for example, to 'hide' some characters from view and encourage us to concentrate on just one small area of action?
- Is a spotlight used? If so, when and for what purpose?

- Do the clothes the characters wear tell us anything about them as people?

Make-up

Make-up is an important aspect of design. Because ballet dancing requires strength and stamina combined with grace of movement, most dancers are young and slim. However, they may have to appear much older or much less mobile.

- Which characters do you think might have spent most time in the make-up artist's chair?

Special effects

Drosselmeyer is a magician. What special effects, what moments of 'theatre magic', are used during the ballet?

When he is introduced to entertain the guests at the party, how does he make his entrance?

Things to do and discuss

The following tasks are suggested as possible areas for further work. In order to meet the needs of particular groups of pupils the teacher should select and/or adapt.

- Which moments in *The Nutcracker* did you find most enjoyable, and dramatically most effective? Can you explain why?
- Comment on any situations or moments when you felt either the lighting, or the music, was especially important - perhaps in creating atmosphere or intensifying the drama.
- How did you react to Drosselmeyer? Did you like him? What words do you think best describe him? Would you trust him? Did you sympathise with him for any reason? Was it fair of him to involve Clara in his plan to break the spell on his nephew?
- What special effects, or 'theatre magic', did you notice? Were these effects included just to entertain the audience, or were they important to the story?
- Imagine you are Clara. Write a letter to a friend describing your experiences during the night following the Christmas party. Remember to describe how you felt as well as what you saw and did.
- Design a poster for *The Nutcracker*. Choose any incident, scene or character you think 'captures' an important aspect of the ballet. The purpose of the poster should be to arouse curiosity and further interest.

- For each of the following select two or three adjectives which you think best describe the character:

Clara

Drosselmeyer

Sugar Plum Fairy

Now compose short tunes and/or choreograph movement motifs which express the qualities you have identified for each character.

When composing your tunes, consider:

- What sort of rhythm pattern is appropriate?
- Will the tune be smooth or will it leap around?
At what pitch?
- Will it be loud or soft?
- Which instrument best matches the character?

When choreographing, consider:

- What dynamics are appropriate to each character's movements?
- Will the movements be light or heavy, quick and sweeping or sudden and jerky etc.?
- Aspects of space such as the size of movements, levels and floor patterns.

- Working in small groups, create a piece of music to accompany the magical journey through the Land of Snow. Before you begin, try to imagine you are really there. How do you feel? How can you express your feeling in music?

There are several decisions you will need to make. For example:

Timbre - From the types of instrumental sounds available to you, which are the most appropriate?

Pitch - Will you use instruments of high pitch or low pitch?

Will you use a mixture?

Will you, perhaps, use untuned instruments?

Melody - Will you want to use melody? If so, will it be smooth and use mainly stepwise movement, or will it contain leaps?

Rhythm - Will it be a steady, even pattern, or will it be irregular?

Will it be a strong, driving rhythm, or will it be gentle?

Will it have a repeated pattern?

Tempo - Will the music be fast or slow? Will it remain the same tempo throughout?

Dynamics - Will the music be soft or loud? Will it stay the same throughout?

Texture - Will the texture be thick or thin? Will all of the instruments play all of the time? Will you add layers of sound - the sound of one instrument being added to that of another instrument (or other instruments) already playing?

- How will the music be written down so that it can be played on future occasions? Will you use a graphic score or staff notation? Remember to make clear to performers how the music should be played.
- Perform the rhythm only of the Trepak extract, either by clapping or using untuned percussion instruments. Use repeats, and explore a range of dynamic levels without gaining or losing speed. You may wish to compose your own trepak using the same rhythm pattern.
- In groups of two to four, research a national dance of a selected country and then choreograph your own stylised version. Draw upon aspects such as the specific movements of certain body parts such as wrists, head, feet, and the dynamic colouring - is the dance crisp, fluid, energetic etc? You might like to also design costumes for your dance, again drawing from the proper national dress.
- Use the children's dance in Act I as a starting point for choreographing a group celebratory dance (work in pairs within groups of six to eight). Try to include several different travelling step patterns and a variety of arrangements such as single and concentric circles, diagonal lines, and weaving in and out of one another. Think also about the relationship with your partner and how you can make contact; linking arms side-by-side or facing, holding one hand low or high, holding both hands face-to-face or back-to-back.
- Imagine you are either Clara or Fritz. Choreograph a solo to express your feelings after Clara has been given the Nutcracker doll by Drosselmeyer.
- Recreate the fight dance between the Nutcracker and the King Mouse. Include lots of strong gestures, spins in the air and on the

floor, fast travelling towards one another followed by a moment of action such as a non-contact kick or other gesture, or a lift, and controlled falls to the floor (be mindful of the safety aspect of falling). Decide how your fight is to end.

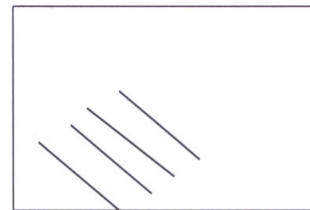
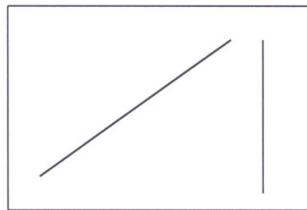
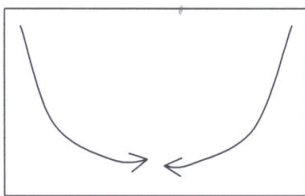
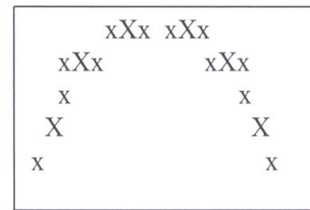
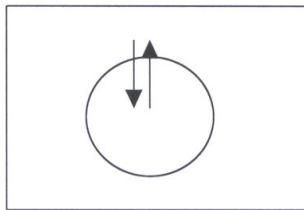
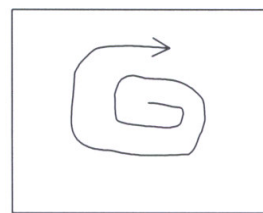
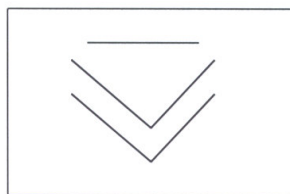
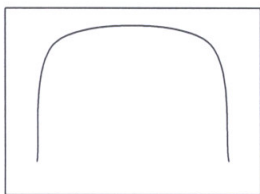
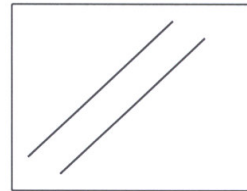
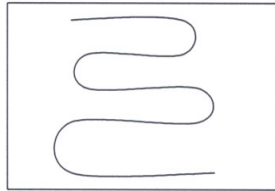
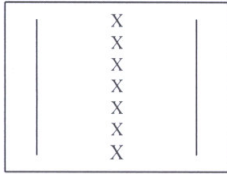
- The Prince's solo is full of difficult leaps and turns. Explore the different shapes you can make while jumping high in the air and the variety of ways that you can spin and turn, thinking about levels and speeds.
- Create a short virtuoso solo which includes some of the leaps, spins and turns you have discovered as well as other linking movements. Ensure your solo covers a large area of the performing space.
- As in all ballet productions, in *The Nutcracker*, the main roles are learnt by more than one dancer. The role is taught to them by a person called a repetiteur, who is often someone who has danced the role themselves. Can you teach your virtuoso solo to another person? Discuss any difficulties that you encounter during the teaching/ learning process.

For older students (GCSE level and upwards):

- (a) Research the history and traditions of Commedia Dell'arte and Pantomime, from which the characters of Columbine and Harlequin, evolved. Make a list of all the different stock characters from these art forms.

- (b) Select one of these characters to research in more detail and then use this information to choreograph a solo which captures the character's personality. Join with a partner (who has choreographed a solo for a different character), and create a pas de deux. Finally, arrange the two solos and the new pas de deux together.

Formations and patterns frequently used in classical ballet choreography



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