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George Balanchine's The Nutcracker™



Photo © Paul Kolnik

Music The Nutcracker (1892) by Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky



Choreography George Balanchine © The George Balanchine Trust

Premiere February 2, 1954, New York City Ballet, City Center of Music and Drama

Original Cast Maria Tallchief, Nicholas Magallanes, Tanaquil LeClerq, Michael Arshansky, Alberta Grant, Susan Kaufman, Paul Nickel

Average Length Act I: 49 min. Act II: 41 min.

New York City Ballet gave its first performance of George Balanchine's *The Nutcracker™* in February, 1954. Since then, the Company has danced 1,560 performances. During the holiday period, the entire Company is immersed in activities surrounding George Balanchine's *The Nutcracker™*. All 90 dancers, 62 musicians, 32 stagehands and two casts of 50 young students each from the School of American Ballet join forces to make each performance as magical as possible. Children of all ages from New York City and the nation fill the New York State Theater to be captivated by the lure of Tchaikovsky's music, Balanchine's choreography, Karinska's sumptuous costumes, and Rouben Ter-Arutunian's magical sets. George Balanchine's *The Nutcracker™*, based on the Alexandre Dumas pere version of E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale, *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* (1816), demands a full-scale production. The elaborate stage elements and intricate lighting unleash the viewers' imagination by providing visual effects that are extraordinarily grand. The most famous example is the one-ton Christmas tree that grows from a height of 12 feet to 40 feet, evoking audible gasps of disbelief from the audience at each performance. Other notable feats include the comic figure of "Mother Ginger"--85 pounds and nine feet wide, the costume requires handling by three people once it is lowered by pulley over the dancer's head--as well as the continuous flutter of the purest, crystal-shaped snowflakes (which are swept up and conserved after each performance

"CLASSICISM IS ENDURING BECAUSE IT IS IMPERSONAL."

— George Balanchine

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for reuse). While these technical achievements are wonderful fun, it is Balanchine's choreography that sustains the ballet through two acts. Act I introduces the characters-- the Stahlbaum children, Marie and Fritz, Herr Drosselmeier and his Nephew--and also begins the transition from reality into fantasy with the concluding Snowflake Waltz. Act II offers the complete transformation. We have entered the "Kingdom of the Sugarplum Fairy" and there is no turning back. George Balanchine's The Nutcracker™ is one of the most complex theatrical, staged ballets in the Company's active repertory of 150 works. The popularity of the ballet is immense and it provides an unforgettable spark to everyone's holiday season. Peter Ilyitch Tschaikovsky (1840-1893) studied at the Conservatory in St. Petersburg, where Balanchine later studied piano in addition to his studies in dance. Tschaikovsky is one of the most popular and influential of all romantic composers. His work is expressive, melodic, grand in scale, with rich orchestrations. His output was prodigious and included chamber works, symphonies, concerti for various instruments, operas and works for the piano. His creations for the ballet, composed in close partnership with Marius Petipa, include Swan Lake, The Nutcracker and The Sleeping Beauty.
