



Ballet for Young Audiences' THE NUTCRACKER

Music by Tchaikovsky

Study Guide

ABOUT THE PLAY

THE NUTCRACKER BALLET tells the story of Clara, a young girl of an age between child and woman, whose dreams are both childish and tinged with romance. She is the favorite godchild of Herr Drosselmeyer, a mysterious clockmaker who is wise about all mechanical devices. He creates beautiful and unusual toys for Clara.

The ballet opens with the arrival of guests and the lighting of the tree at the Christmas party of Clara's parents. Herr Drosselmeyer brings with him three life sized dolls; a Harlequin, a Soldier, and a Columbine to entertain all the children. He also brings a special gift for his goddaughter - the Nutcracker. Although the Nutcracker is a strange looking doll with a strong jaw and large teeth, Clara is delighted with him. She begs her godfather to make him taller so she may dance with him, whereupon Herr Drosselmeyer illustrates his usefulness by cracking nuts for the children.

Clara is distressed to tears when her brother, Fritz, accidentally breaks the Nutcracker, but her godfather is clever enough to fix him. After a final dance and toast, the guests depart bidding the family goodnight and merry Christmas.

The family retires and near midnight Clara steals into the living room to spend the night near her beloved toy. As the clock strikes, the familiar figure of Herr Drosselmeyer appears and the light becomes nightmarish and frightening. From the darkness in the corner of the room, a huge Mouse King appears. Clara clutches her Nutcracker tightly and her magical godfather propels the scene into motion. The Nutcracker vanquishes the Mouse King, but is mortally wounded.

Once again, Herr Drosselmeyer's uses his magic and turns the fallen Nutcracker into the handsome prince of Clara's dreams who invites her to visit his realm, Confitureburg or, as we know it, the Land of Sweets. Together they fly over the Snow Country and through the Forest of Pines to arrive at his court which is peopled by courtiers from many different lands. First to entertain is the Tea Maiden from China, followed by the Spirits of Chocolate from Spain. There is aromatic Coffee from Arabia, and a charming Marzipan from Austria. The Prince himself dances a peppermint hoop dance and invites Clara to dance to the music of the Sugar Plum. As dawn approaches, they all join together in a finale to the evening's festivities. Herr Drosselmeyer reappears and the Court and the Nutcracker Prince slowly dissolve, leaving Clara alone, wondering if it was real or merely a dream.