

*Brighton Ballet Theater's
Russian American Kids Ballet
Presents*

A Winter Fairy Tale

STUDY GUIDE

What is ballet?

The very first ballets, which were created almost 500 years ago, do not look anything at all like the ballets we see performed by ballet companies today.

The word ballet comes from the Italian word *ballare*, which means to dance. The first ballets were court dances (called *balletti* in Italian), which were danced by the men and women of the Italian Court. These ballets were not performed in the theaters, but usually in palaces of the rich and famous people of that time.

The steps in these ballets were very simple because the costumes were made with very heavy fabrics and ornaments. Some costumes weighed as much as 150 pounds. But still the movements were very graceful, emphasizing the head, arms and upper body, while the dancers created very elaborate floor patterns.

The first court ballet that we know about was choreographed in 1489, in honor of the Duke of Milan's marriage to Isabel of Aragon.

A whole "language" describes the different steps in ballet. Because people first began writing down the steps of the dances in France, French is used for the "language" of ballet.

Glossary

BALLERINA - Female ballet dancer.

DANSEUR - Male ballet dancer.

CHOREOGRAPHER- Derived from the Greek words *choria* (dance) and *graphes* (writer), movements arranged and planned within a dance.

POINTE SHOES - Satin slippers that have a glue hardened toe and a strongly reinforced sole to support the arch of the foot when the dancer is standing on the tips of the toes.

ELEVATION - A term used to indicate the height of the jump attained by the dancer.

TURN OUT - Ballet dancers perform all their movements in a turned out position, which means that the legs are rotated outward from the hip. The “turn out” enables the dancer to perform all movements gracefully.

ADAGIO - A slow movement in dance.

ALLEGRO - A dance performed to a lively and fast tempo.

PLIE - A bending of the knees with the feet in any one of the five ballet positions.

All jumps must begin and end in plie.

FONDU - “Sinking down,” a plie performed on one leg only.

GRAND BATTEMENT - A high kick that is done to the front, side, and back.

JETE - A leap from one leg to the other that may be performed in all directions.

PAS DE DEUX - A dance involving two people, usually involving a danseur and a ballerina.

PIROUETTE - To whirl or spin on one foot.

RELEVE - A rise onto the ball of the foot or the tips of the toes.

Synopsis

The Nutcracker is based on the original story by the German writer and composer E.T.A Hoffman.

The original story takes place in Nuremberg, Germany, on Christmas Eve, and centers on a little girl named Marie. Marie and her brother, Fritz, receive many gifts from their parents and from their godfather, Dr. Drosselmeyer. One of his gifts to them is a wooden nutcracker, to which Marie takes an active liking. She and Fritz are taking turns cracking nuts in the Nutcracker's mouth, when Fritz accidentally breaks its jaws and teeth. Marie becomes upset and insists in nursing the Nutcracker back to health. Before going to sleep that night, Marie tenderly puts the Nutcracker to bed and promises to care for him until he is recovered.

Before Marie can get to bed, an army of mice led by the wicked Mouse King appears. They come out of the walls and up through the floor boards, making a frightful hissing noise as they slowly march toward her. As they advance, the Nutcracker jumps from his bed, calling his army of toys to attention. The Nutcracker and his army fight the mice, but are no match for them; the mice drive the toys back toward the glass cupboard from which they came. In a desperate attempt to help, Marie takes off her shoe and throws it at the Mouse King, knocking him to the floor. At once, the entire mouse army disappears, and Marie faints away.

The next morning, Marie awakens to see her mother and Dr, Drosselmeyer beside her. She asks about the Nutcracker and inquires whether or not all the mice have gone away. Marie describes the battle to her mother and the doctor, but sees that neither of them believe her story. They attempt to console her and gently tell Marie that she needs to rest, that all the mice have gone away, and the Nutcracker is safe and sound in his glass cupboard.