

THE

BMO  PRESENTS

NUTCRACKER

DECEMBER 8-26 | MARCUS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

AUDIENCE GUIDE

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Welcome to *The Nutcracker: Drosselmeyer's Imaginarium*! More than 200 dancers take the stage in this holiday favorite featuring elaborate sets, lavish period costumes, special effects, and magic tricks. The childlike sense of wonder in *The Nutcracker* is underscored by students of Milwaukee Ballet School & Academy who dance onstage with the professional Company. Tchaikovsky's iconic score is played live by the Milwaukee Ballet Orchestra, creating an atmosphere of immersive grandeur.

History

The Nutcracker was originally based on a story by German writer E. T. A. Hoffmann. Tchaikovsky was commissioned to write the music in 1891 by the Imperial Theatre of St. Petersburg (Maryinsky Theatre) in Russia. The legendary choreographer Marius Petipa (first ballet-master to His Imperial Majesty the Tsar) presented Tchaikovsky with the exact scenario he wanted, including the rhythm, tempo, and number of measures for each dance. Petipa later became ill and the choreographic work was assumed by his assistant, Lev Ivanov. (Lev Ivanov is also credited with choreographing the white acts of *Swan Lake*, the acts that feature the beautiful corps of dancing swans!)

The Nutcracker debuted on December 17, 1892, in the Maryinsky Theatre, which is still the home of the Kirov Ballet. The original cast included ballet students, just as the Kirov Ballet and Kirov Academy production does today. Although popular in Russia, *The Nutcracker* was not performed outside of Russia until 1934, when Nicholas Sergeyev staged it at the Sadler Wells Theatre in England. After the Revolution, the Russian presentation had been restaged by Vassily Vainonen.

The Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo debuted a shortened version of *The Nutcracker* in the United States in 1940. It was this production of *The Nutcracker* that George Balanchine and Alexandra Danilova remembered and "danced out" for San Francisco Ballet's William Christensen. Because of this, the United States got its first full-length version in 1944, even though the director had never seen it! This version gave birth to the American tradition that lives on through ballet companies every holiday season.

A lot of people think every version of *The Nutcracker* is the same – but they're not! Milwaukee Ballet's version was choreographed by our Artistic Director, Michael Pink, and in 2023, *Drosselmeyer's Imaginarium* premiered with new sets designed by Todd Edward Ivins, costumes designed by Gregory A. Poplyk, and lighting designed by David Grill.

The Music

Milwaukee Ballet Orchestra plays Tchaikovsky's iconic score live. *Drosselmeyer's Imaginarium* features some unique twists, including sound effects designed by Barry G. Funderburg, additional music and transitions composed by Music Director Andrews Sill, and a new variation for the Harlequin dancer never before seen in *The Nutcracker*! Experience the wonder of the world-famous suites, including *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy*, *Waltz of the Flowers*, and *March of The Nutcracker*. Milwaukee Ballet is one of the only ballet companies in the nation to maintain its very own symphonic orchestra.

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SYNOPSIS

Drosselmeyer's Imaginarium is a place where anyone can imagine anything they wish...

Act I

In Drosselmeyer's magical workshop, all is not quite what it seems. There, Drosselmeyer, a toymaker, and Karl, his nephew, prepare extra-special gifts for the Tannenbaum children and their friends. Outside, the city prepares for Christmas Eve: a time of merriment, goodwill, and charity.

The Tannenbaum's annual Christmas party is bubbling over with festive cheer. Clara, Fritz, and especially their eldest sister Marie eagerly await the entrance of Drosselmeyer and Karl. Upon their arrival, the two delight and surprise the guests with an array of magic tricks and dancing dolls. The last gift Drosselmeyer saves for Clara: a wonderful Nutcracker doll.

Once the guests have departed, the sisters retire to Clara's bedroom to reflect on the thrilling events of the evening, in particular Karl's gift to Marie. Suddenly, the bedroom floor comes to life with unusually dressed mice, frightening the two girls. In the distance, the conservatory clock begins to chime midnight but then seems to become confused as to the actual time. Clara and Marie return to the conservatory, followed by Fritz, where they find the Nutcracker marching along the mantelpiece, as if he were guarding it. The children begin to think something is not quite right...

Drosselmeyer appears on the mantelpiece next to the Nutcracker. He sprinkles his enchanted magic dust over the children, and so begins their adventure in the *Imaginarium*.

The Christmas tree grows so tall that it lifts the ceiling of the conservatory up high into the stars. A battle begins between the King Rat and his mouse army versus the toy soldiers, who are led by Karl the Nutcracker Prince. After their triumph, Drosselmeyer, Karl, and the Tannenbaum children travel to a magical land of snow, and from there fly in a hot air balloon further into the magical *Imaginarium*.

Act II

The balloon crosses the skies over Lemonade Lake and lands in the Capital, where it is greeted by the mayor. Another encounter with the King Rat ensues, and a victorious Karl is proclaimed prince of the Kingdom.

Drosselmeyer guides Clara, Fritz, and Marie onwards through the *Imaginarium*. They are welcomed by a trumpet fanfare before being captivated at the Mystical Oasis and enthralled with the Lion and the Phoenix Bird. Upon their arrival in Fun Town, they are surprised to see Karl as a Harlequin dancing with the Jacks. In the Balloon Meadow, the Mechanical Doll invites Clara to dance with her, and then the delightful Madame BonBon welcomes them to Confectionville, where the sweetest of the sweets is Marie the Sugar Plum Fairy. Their journey continues through the Field of Dancing Flowers before arriving back at the Capital for the celebration of Prince Karl and Princess Marie.

By now, both Clara and Fritz are beginning to feel rather tired, so everyone in the *Imaginarium* bids them and Marie goodbye as they drift back to the conservatory. Oh, what stories they will tell their parents! But did it all really happen, or was it just their imagination?

LET IT SNOW!

The snow scene is one of the most iconic in this ballet. Even though dancers appear to float effortlessly, it's actually quite an aerobic workout! It's also difficult to dance in the falling paper snow. The snow comes out of a big turning drum 20 feet above the stage. As it turns round and round, snow comes out of it as if through a sieve. The snow is recycled and used for each show.

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FUN FACTS

5
There are 5 casts (or groups of dancers playing the roles) in the show.

16
There are 16 performances of *The Nutcracker* and 3 student matinees.

23
There are 23 dancers in Milwaukee Ballet II.

137
There were 137 students cast in the world premiere of *Drosselmeyer's Imaginarium*.

170
There were 170 costumes made for this production, most of which consist of 5-10 pieces of clothing, jewelry, and headwear.

31
The dancers dance from 9 AM to 6:15 PM Monday through Friday for 31 weeks a year.

15
The Sugar Plum tutu is made with 15 distinct fabrics.

25
There are 25 dancers in the main company.