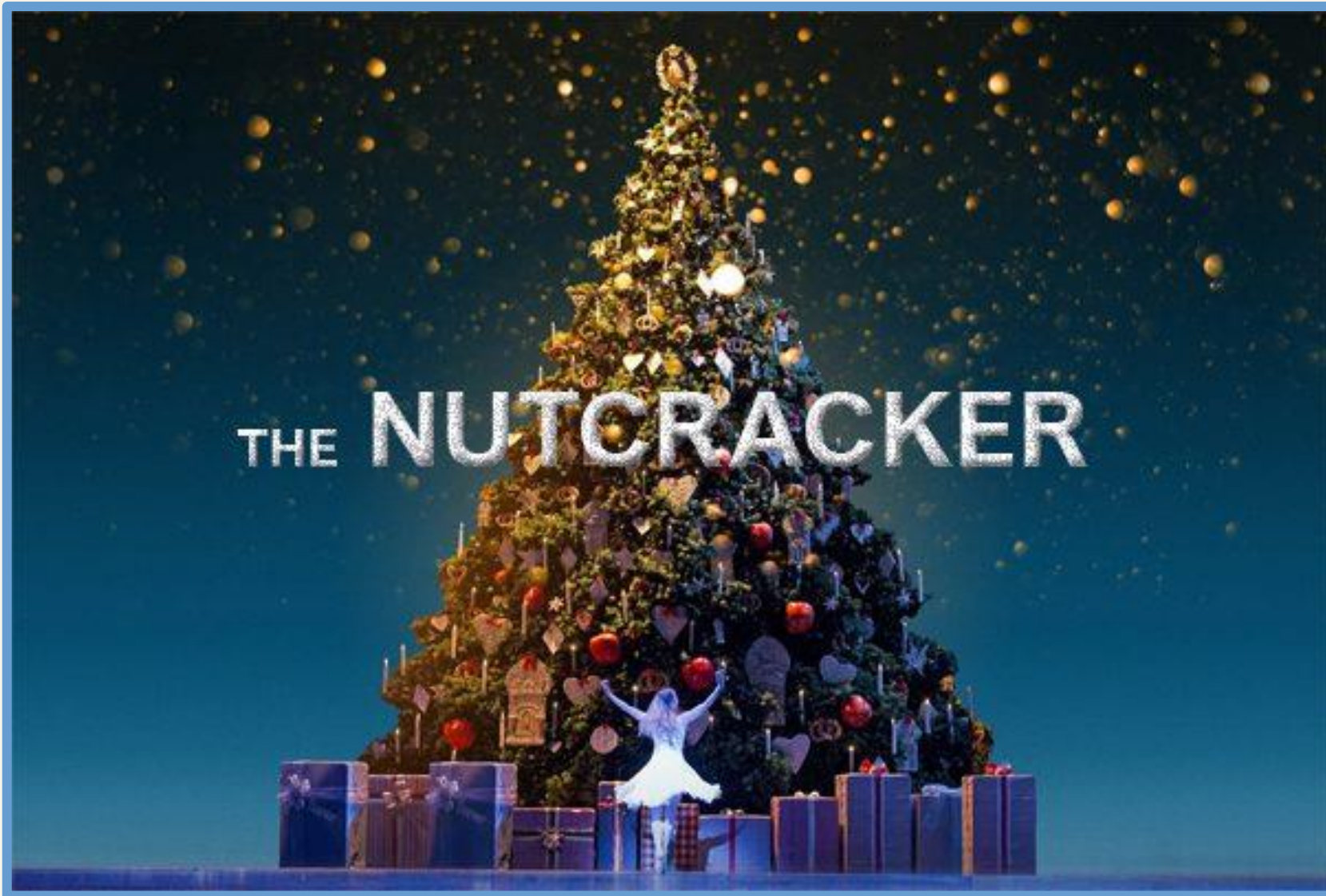




The Nutcracker

Composer of the Week



THE NUTCRACKER

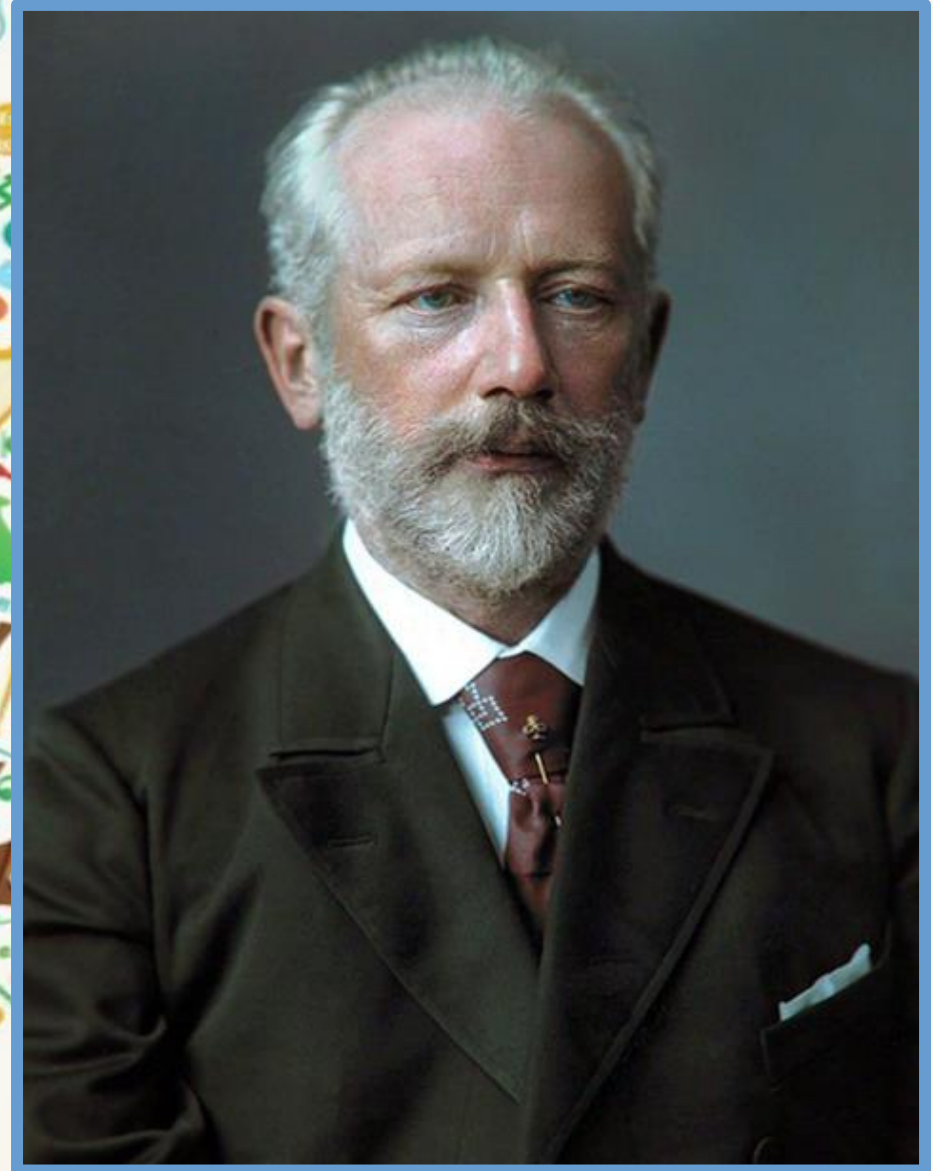
Composed in 1892



The Nutcracker is a **ballet** composed by a famous Russian composer.

Can you remember his name?

**Pyotr Ilyich
Tchaikovsky**



The story is based on a short story written by an important **Romantic** author **E.T.A.Hoffman** – **The Nutcracker and the Mouse King.**

Romanticism was a style of writing which was emotional and dramatic.

Many **romantic** composers used the works of **E.T.A.Hoffman** as a basis for their works.



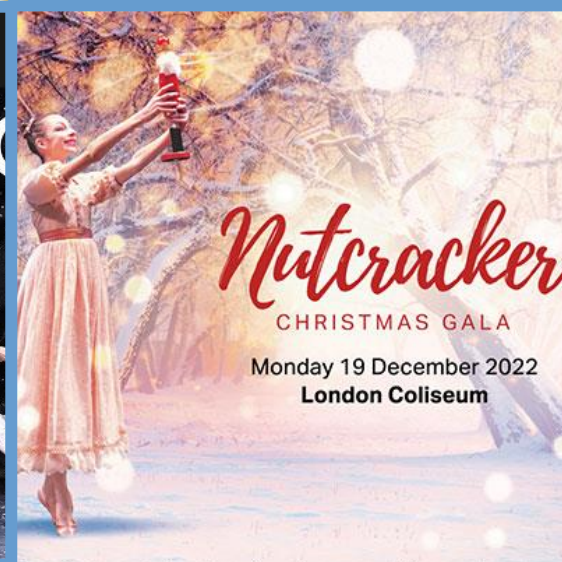
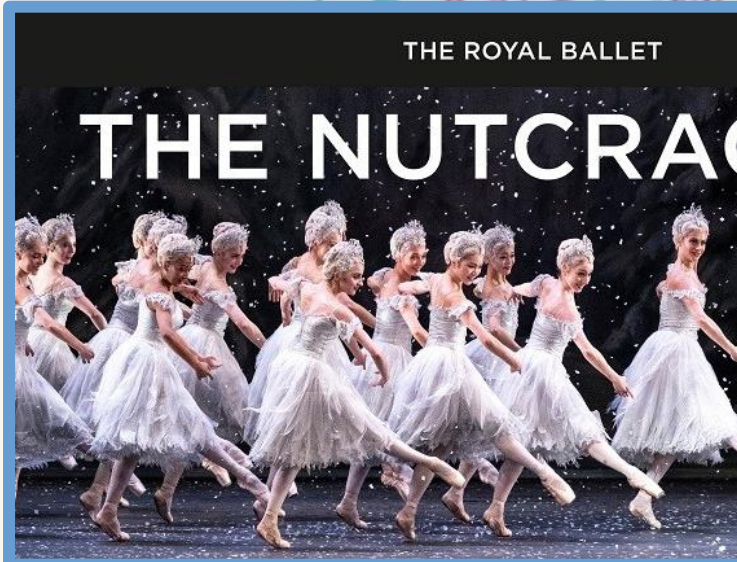
The story takes place on Christmas Eve and therefore this ballet is nearly always performed at this time of year.

Ballet music needs to be very dramatic and descriptive because there are no words. Tchaikovsky's music paints pictures in your head and helps you understand what the characters are feeling.

The music of **The Nutcracker** is very famous and you will recognise much of it.

Many ballet companies, all over the world, rely on productions of **The Nutcracker** at Christmas to provide a large percentage of their income so they can survive for the rest of the year.

There are several productions you can see in London at present.



There are many photographs available of the original production in 1892.



The **choreographer** was **Marius Petipa**, who also worked with Tchaikovsky on his ballet **The Sleeping Beauty**.

Petipa gave Tchaikovsky extremely detailed instructions for the composition of each number, down to the **tempo** (speed) and number of bars - how long each section lasted.

What is a
Choreographer?

A **choreographer** is the person who devises the dances and steps.

The ballet is written in two **acts** (parts).

The first part takes place in the house of the Stahlbaum family. It is Christmas Eve and the family are having a party while decorating the Christmas tree. Clara and her brother Fritz are waiting for their godfather, the toymaker, Uncle Drosselmeyer to arrive.



Listen to the toy soldiers marching.

Tchaikovsky uses **trumpets** to depict the soldiers, followed by **stringed instruments** with a galloping rhythm – this helps us imagine the soldiers on horseback. Uncle Drosselmeyer brings the children four special, lifelike dolls who immediately begin to dance.



The final present is a nutcracker carved in the shape of a young man.

Clara is fascinated by the nutcracker but Fritz manages to break it. Drosselmeyer promises to mend the nutcracker and the children go to bed.



It is nearly midnight, Clara can't sleep because she is worried about the Nutcracker. She goes down to check, and finds that, as the clock strikes midnight, the toys – and the mice – start to grow bigger.

The Nutcracker and the soldiers begin fighting the mice, and the mice are winning. Clara throws her slipper at the Mouse King and he falls to the floor.



The Nutcracker transforms into a handsome Prince. He is so thankful that he invites Clara to come with him to his kingdom, the Land of Sweets.

The first **Act** ends as they travel through the snow. Watch how the dance moves fit with the music. First there are **flutes** - single snowflakes. Then the **strings** join, just like the larger snow flurries.

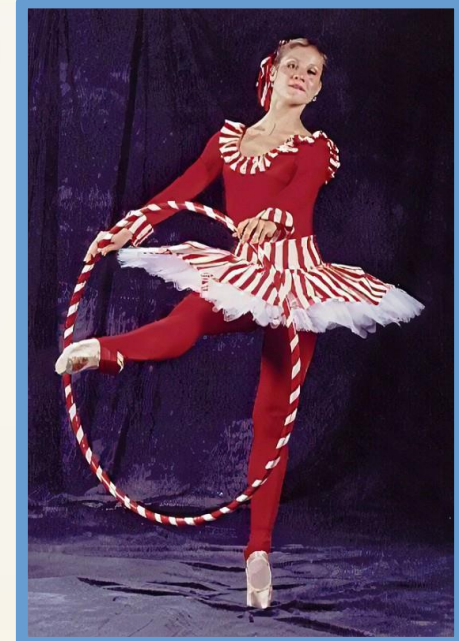




The second Act takes place in the Land of Sweets. The Prince has arranged a wonderful show for Clara.

Chocolate from Spain is produced, then coffee from Arabia, tea from China and Candy Canes from Russia.

The Reed Flutes dance, followed by the Flowers and finally it's the turn of the Sugar Plum Fairy, who has been looking after the Land of Sweets while the Prince was away.



The Chinese Dance uses **flutes** and **piccolos** (small, high flutes) while the strings play **pizzicato** (plucking the strings).



The Russian Dance is based on traditional Russian folk music. It is very energetic with sudden accents portraying the acrobatic nature of the dance.



In the Dance of the Reed Flutes the ballerinas play flutes on stage mimicking the music of the orchestra.

The strings play **pizzicato** again.

Can you remember what that is?

Plucking the strings



The Waltz of the Flowers is also a very famous piece of music.

Listen out for the harp playing in the introduction.

Can you remember how many **beats** (counts) there are in a waltz?

Three



The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy is the most famous piece of music in the ballet.

It uses a special instrument called a **celesta**. Another name for it is the **bell piano**, because of the sound it makes.

The instrument looks and works just like a piano but the hammers inside strike metal plates rather than the strings of a piano.

The name comes from the French **celeste** which means heavenly.

Do you think it sounds like its name?



It's time for Clara to leave and she flies home in Uncle Drosselmeyer's sleigh.



In some versions she awakes, under a tree, still clutching the Nutcracker.

Was it all a dream?

Over the years there have been many versions of the Nutcracker and many people have used the music in their songs. These include:



Mariah Carey

Madonna



Films which have used the music include:

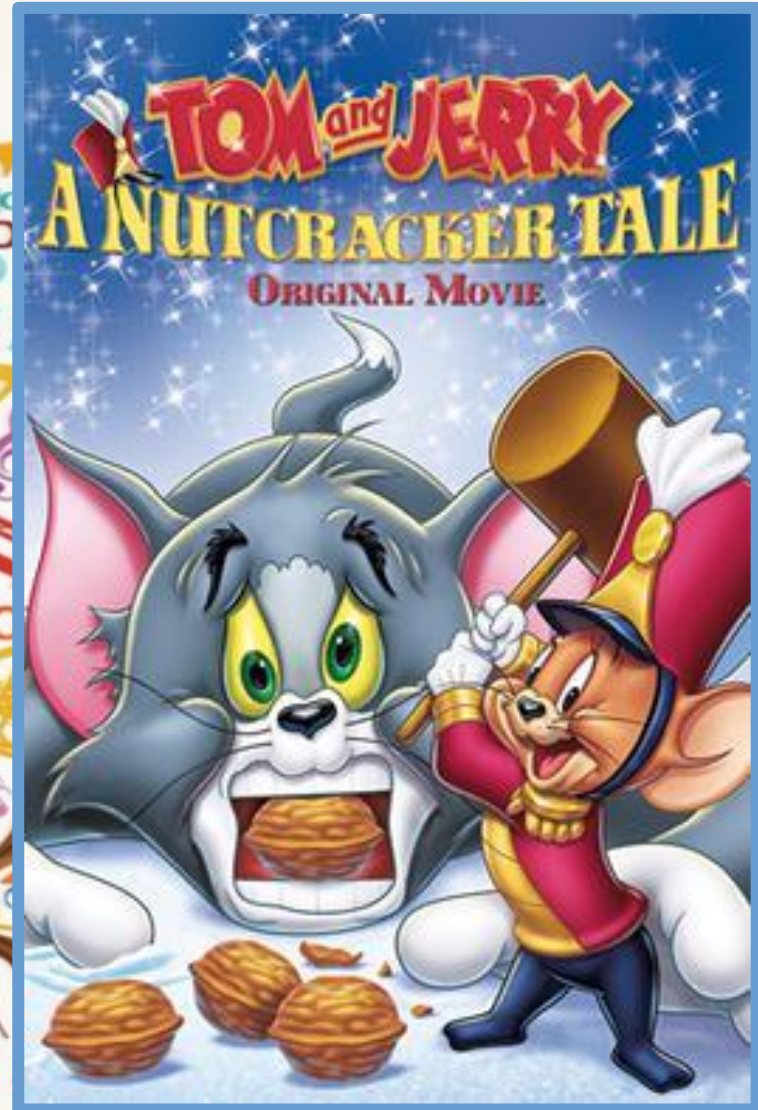
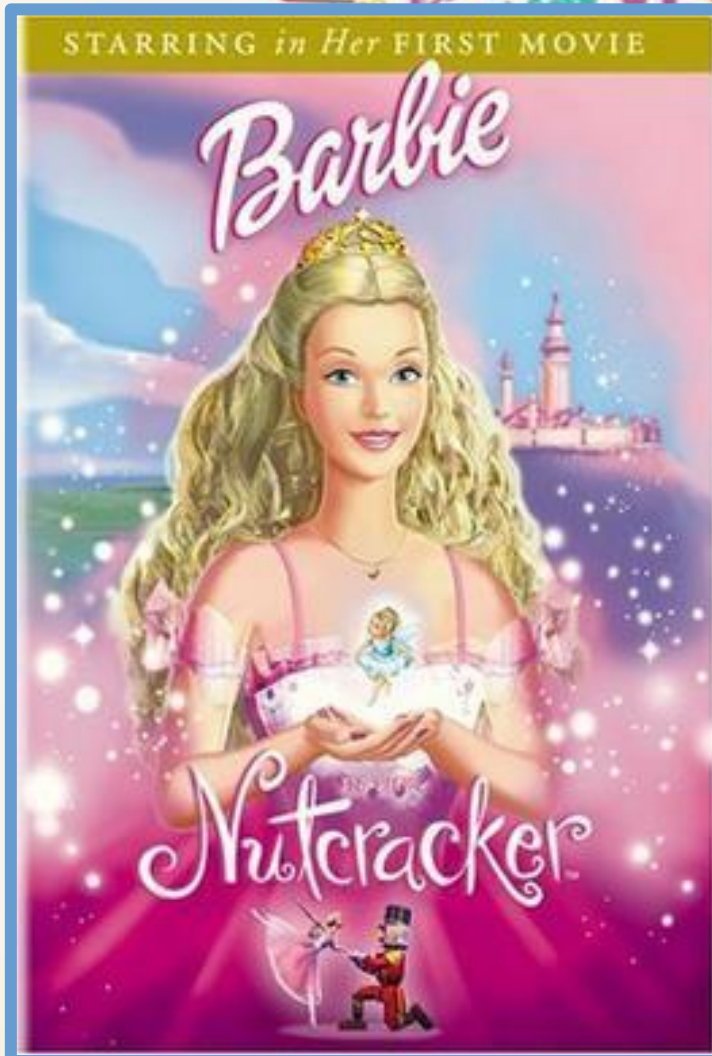
The Care Bears



Fantasia



Barbie



Tom and Jerry

In 2018 Disney released a live-action film called The Nutcracker and the Four Realms.





The nutcracker sits under the holiday tree, a guardian of childhood stories. Feed him walnuts and he will crack open a tale...

Vera Nazarian

