



TELARC
SUPER
AUDIO CD

TCHAIKOVSKY

NUTCRACKER

FAVORITE SELECTIONS



ERICH KUNZEL

CINCINNATI POPS
ORCHESTRA

Late in 1890 Tchaikovsky was approached by Prince Vselvolozhsky, director of the Imperial Theater in St. Petersburg, and Marius Petipa, the French dancer and choreographer who created an unprecedented standard of ballet production and execution after settling in Russia in 1847, to compose a full evening's entertainment—a one-act opera and a ballet. The subject for the opera was to be of Tchaikovsky's choice (he picked *King René's Daughter* by the Danish dramatist Hendrik Herz, which the composer's brother Modest turned into a libretto titled *Iolanthe*), but that for the ballet was specified as E.T.A. Hoffmann's story of *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, one of the most popular tales in Russia at the time. Tchaikovsky had read Hoffmann's *Nutcracker* in 1882 "with great pleasure," and he accepted the commission.

Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann (he changed his third name from Wilhelm for love of Mozart), born in 1776, was a German writer, painter, and musician whose life and works were inflamed by the ardent spirit of Romanticism. As a young man, he studied law, and held positions in the Prussian bureaucracy until Napoleon overthrew the government in 1806. Thereafter he served as an opera conductor in Bamberg, Dresden, and Leipzig, and took up musical composition, producing a symphony, a ballet, some sacred works, a few chamber pieces, and twelve operas. He returned to government service in 1816, as a justice of the supreme court in Berlin, a post he retained until his death in 1822. Hoffmann turned to writing late in his career, after he had moved to Berlin. He produced two novels and a treatise on the problems of theater direction, but he is best known for his collections of short stories that explore the fantastic, grotesque, and even sinister aspects of the imagination, often with sharp wit and deep psychological insight. (A talented artist, he also illustrated several of his own books.) Hoffmann was a strong influence on Edgar Allan Poe and other nineteenth-century writers of fantasy, and his tales served as inspiration for compositions by Wagner (*Die Meistersinger*), Offenbach (*The Tales of Hoffmann*), Delibes (*Coppélia*) as well as Tchaikovsky.

The scenario devised for the new ballet by Petipa, who had also choreographed the premiere of *The Sleeping Beauty*, was not based directly on Hoffmann's original story, but rather on a French adaptation by Alexandre Dumas père that considerably softened the grotesque elements and erotic

undertones of the German Romanticist's narrative. Tchaikovsky objected to the lack of faithfulness to Hoffmann's original, much of whose interest for him lay precisely in its juxtaposition of the naïve, idyllic images of youth with moments of *grotesquerie*, but resigned himself to his contractual agreement, and told Modest shortly after starting composition in February 1891 that "I am beginning to be reconciled to the subject."

Just as he was undertaking *Nutcracker*, Tchaikovsky was invited to the United States to conduct his music at the inaugural festivities celebrating the opening of Carnegie Hall in New York City. He agreed to go, and in March set out on a concert tour that took him en route across Germany and to Paris. Always interested in novel sounds, Tchaikovsky heard in Paris the celesta, a recent invention of the celebrated harmonium builder, Victor Mustel, and realized that its ethereal tone would be perfect for his new ballet. He urged his publisher, Jergenson, to obtain one immediately: "Have it sent directly to St. Petersburg, but no one there must know about it. I am afraid Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov might hear of it and make use of it before I do. I expect it to make a tremendous impression." *Nutcracker* was the instrument's first use in an orchestral score.

Tchaikovsky was home from his American tour by May, and resumed work immediately on *Nutcracker*. He finished sketching the score by the end of the following month, though not without the misgivings he usually expressed over his new works. "The ballet is infinitely worse than *The Sleeping Beauty*, that much is certain," he lamented to his brother Modest. "Let's see how the opera will turn out." Like the true professional composer he had become, however, he labored on despite his doubts, working on *Iolanthe* during the fall, and completing the orchestration of *Nutcracker* by the following February. With the premiere of the new ballet and opera delayed until December 1892, he conducted some of his new music at a concert in St. Petersburg on March 19. The suite of eight numbers he extracted from the complete score of the ballet was so successful that five of the movements were immediately encored. The premiere of the full ballet on December 18, though lavishly mounted, fared less well. Casting changes and the public's increasing familiarity with subject and score soon led to *Nutcracker's* wide acceptance, however, and it has remained one of the most popular of all ballets.

THE STORY

The elfin *Overture*, ethereally scored only for woodwinds, horns, triangle, violins, and violas, precedes the curtain.

The ballet begins with a Christmas party at the home of the President of the Town Council and his wife (*The Christmas Tree*). The door bursts open, and Clara and Fritz, the President's children, run in, accompanied by some of their playmates. The President suggests that the children don paper hats and parade about the room (*March*). Among the adults who subsequently arrive (*Children's Galop and Arrival of the Guests*) is the mysterious Councillor Drosselmeyer, who gives Clara a large nutcracker with a grotesque head. Fritz takes it from her, and breaks the Nutcracker in trying to crack open an overly large nut. Clara carefully gathers up the pieces. The party ends (*Pas de deux—Doll and Toy Soldiers*) *Tempo di Valse*. The guests leave, the children are sent to bed; the President extinguishes the lights and retires. Clara steals back into the living room, lit only by the candles on the tree, to look again at her broken Nutcracker.

Midnight strikes, the clock's face having taken on the features of Drosselmeyer. Mice scurry out from the corners of the room. Clara, terrified, climbs into a chair, only to see the Christmas tree grow magically to an enormous size. (*The Magic Spell Begins*). The gingerbread men left over from tea suddenly spring to life as soldiers to battle the mice. They are being beaten (and eaten) by the mice, when the Nutcracker jumps up to become their leader. He is confronted by the Mouse King himself, and appears about to meet his fate when Clara hurls her slipper at the rodent-monster and kills him. The mice, leaderless, flee, and the Nutcracker is transformed into a gallant Prince. As reward for saving his life, he invites Clara to visit his kingdom. She accepts. In the *Scene in the Pine Forest (Journey Through the Snow)* Clara and the Prince travel through a dense, snow-covered forest, guided by gnomes bearing torches. The travelers are met on their arrival by the King and Queen of the Snowflakes, who dance with their subjects to the wordless accompaniment of a choir of treble voices (*Waltz of the Snowflakes*).



In the great hall of the castle, lit by lanterns held by twelve pages (*The Magic Castle*), the Prince describes to the assembled court how Clara saved his life (*Clara and the Prince*). At a sign from the Sugar-Plum Fairy, a sumptuous banquet appears; Clara is ushered to a miniature throne at the head of the table, and a *Divertissement* in her honor begins. The first three of the *Divertissement's* dances represent the banquet refreshments: a sparkling Spanish bolero depicts Chocolate (*Spanish Dance*), a mysterious and exotic *Arabian Dance* symbolizes *Coffee*, and a bubbling *Chinese Dance* illustrates *Tea*. Next comes the fiery *Trepak*, the traditional dance of the Russian Cossacks, which serves as a musical foil for the delicate *Dance of the Mirlitons*, or toy flutes. The *Divertissement* concludes with a merry depiction of *Mother Gigone*, also known as the "Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe," and some antics by a group of clowns.

The Sugar-Plum Fairy's retinue pays tribute to Clara in the *Waltz of the Flowers*. The *Pas de Deux* contains the *Dance of the Prince and the Sugar-Plum Fairy*; a *Tarantella* for the Prince alone; the *Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy*, with its famous solo for celesta; and the *Coda*, for both partners. In the *Final Waltz and Apotheosis*, the entire court joins in a grand dance, after which the music that accompanied Clara and the Prince on their arrival at his realm returns as the Sugar-Plum Fairy pays final tribute to the girl who saved the Prince.

— Richard E. Rodda

ABOUT THIS TELARC SACD

Stereo Programs:

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TECHNICAL INFORMATION

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Microphones: Neumann KU-100; Sennheiser MKH-800, MKH-20, MKH-30; Royer SF-24
On-Stage Microphone Preamplifiers: UpState Audio Sonic Lens 20/20 and Millennia HV-3D
Console: Studer 962 and 961 custom modified



Interconnecting Cables: Music Interface Technologies Proline
with Balanced Terminators;



Monster Cable Pro-1000 Series



Digital Recording System: Sonoma Direct Stream Digital Workstation with EMM Labs ADC
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Monitored through EMM Labs Switchman MK2

Monitor Speakers: ATC SCM 150 and SCM 20 Professional Monitors



Control Room Acoustic Treatment:
RPG B.A.D. Panels and Diffusors

Digital Editor: Sonoma DSD

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1. Overture [3:14]

ACT I**FIRST TABLEAU**

2. Scene 1: The Christmas Tree [3:48]
 3. Scene 2: March [2:39]
 4. Scene 3: Children's Galop and Arrival of the Guests [2:28]
 5. Scene 4: Pas de deux (Doll and Toy Soldier) Tempo di Valse [2:22]
 6. Scene 6: Magic Spell Begins [6:15]

SECOND TABLEAU

7. Scene 8: Scene in the Pine Forest (Journey through the Snow) [3:19]
 8. Scene 9: Waltz of the Snowflakes [6:36]
 Cincinnati Children's Choir • Robyn Lana, director

ACT II

9. Scene 10: The Magic Castle [4:00]
 10. Scene 11: Clara and the Prince [4:55]
 Scene 12: Divertissement:
 11. Chocolate: Spanish Dance [1:17]
 12. Coffee: Arabian Dance [2:37]
 13. Tea: Chinese Dance [1:03]
 14. Trepak: Russian Dance [1:12]
 15. Dance of the Mirlitons [2:22]
 16. Mother Gigone and Her Little Clowns [2:45]
 17. Scene 13: Waltz of the Flowers [7:10]
 Scene 14: Pas de deux:
 18. Dance of the Prince and the Sugar-Plum Fairy [4:32]
 19. Variation I: Tarantella [0:45]
 20. Variation II: Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy [2:10] Julie Spangler, celesta
 21. Coda [1:26]
 22. Scene 15: Final Waltz and Apotheosis [5:28]

Total Playing Time [73:12]

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)
NUTCRACKER
 FAVORITE SELECTIONS

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