

# THE NUTCRACKER

AMERICAN REPERTORY BALLET



 STATE THEATRE  
NEW JERSEY

KEYNOTES

Nutcracker and Mice  
photo: Leighton Chen



## AMERICAN REPERTORY BALLET'S THE NUTCRACKER



American Repertory Ballet's *Nutcracker* has been a holiday tradition since 1964, making it the longest-running *Nutcracker* in New Jersey and one of the longest consecutively-running in the U.S. The current production, directed by the company's Artistic Director, Ethan Stiefel, includes dancers from American Repertory Ballet's professional company and select students from Princeton Ballet School, the official school of ARB.



### CONTENTS

About the Show .....	2
Background on the Ballet.....	3
The Story.....	4
Delicious Dancing.....	5
The Music .....	6
Ballet Vocabulary.....	7
Ballet Positions.....	8
Mime Time.....	9
Amazing Athletes .....	10
Reviewing the Performance .....	11
Going to the Theater.....	12
Resources.....	13



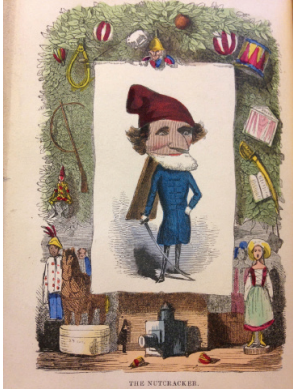
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An illustration from *The History of a Nutcracker*, by Alexandre Dumas

In 1816, the German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann published *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, a frightening story involving a bloody battle between a nutcracker and a seven-headed mouse. He wrote it for adults, and did not intend it for children. In 1844 Alexandre Dumas (author of *The Three Musketeers*) adapted Hoffmann's story for younger audiences.

It was Dumas' version of the story that sparked the interest of Marius Petipa, the senior ballet master of the Russian

Imperial Ballet. He hired the Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to write a score for the production. The choreography was created by Petipa and Lev Ivanov. The first performance of their new *Nutcracker* ballet was on December 18, 1892 in St. Petersburg, Russia. The audience and critics did not like it very much at first.

*The Nutcracker* was not performed outside of Russia until 1934. It was first presented in the U.S. in 1944, by the San Francisco Opera Ballet, with new choreography by Willam Christensen. Since then, *The Nutcracker* has become one of the best-loved shows of the Christmas season. Hundreds of ballet and theater companies all over the world perform it every year.

## ADAPTATION

*The Nutcracker* was changed from a book into a ballet. This process is called **ADAPTATION**—changing something so it can be used in a different way. Think of a book you really liked that was adapted into a movie (such as *The Hunger Games* or *Goosebumps*). Make a list: in one column, list all the things in the movie that were the same as in the book. In the second column, list the things in the movie that were different. Did you like or dislike any of the changes? Why do you think the changes were made?

## LOVE IT OR HATE IT?

Though it is one of the most popular ballets today, *The Nutcracker* was not very successful when it was first performed in 1892. One critic wrote:

*For dancers there is little in it, for art absolutely nothing, and for the artistic fate of our ballet, one more step downward.*

The critic did not seem to think *The Nutcracker* had much of a future, though history has proved him wrong! After you've seen the performance, discuss with your class: Why has this ballet been so successful for so long?

Mother Ginger and her Polichinelles  
photo: Leighton Chen



## ACT I

At the annual Christmas Eve party at the home of the Silverhaus family, Clara and Fritz anxiously await the lighting of the tree. To Clara's horror and Fritz's delight, the maid runs in, chasing a mouse through the hall. Father calls in the children, and the guests arrive: the Elegant Family, the Widow, her daughter and the Dapper Gent, and the Big Family with their nine children.

After the children perform a festive dance, the mysterious Drosselmeyer and their Nephew arrive. Drosselmeyer presents wonderful mechanical dolls, and then presents their niece Clara with a beautifully carved Nutcracker. Fritz is jealous that Clara received such a marvelous gift. Grabbing the Nutcracker away from Clara, he drops it and breaks it. Drosselmeyer bandages the Nutcracker and gives it back to Clara. The party winds down: the guests depart, and the Silverhaus family goes to bed.

Unable to sleep, Clara sneaks downstairs to visit her Nutcracker. She picks up her Nutcracker and begins to dance with it, but strange shadows and the movement of mice disturb her delight. Drosselmeyer reappears and casts her into a dream world, magically transforming the parlor into a battleground. Now grown life sized, Nutcracker and his Toy Soldiers defend the Christmas tree from the Rat King's minions. When her beloved Nutcracker is wounded, Clara defends him by throwing her shoe at the Rat King, vanquishing him and his awful troop. Drosselmeyer transforms the wounded Nutcracker into the Nutcracker Prince who will accompany Clara on an enchanted journey. The parlor becomes the enchanted Land of Snow, where Clara and the Nutcracker Prince meet the beautiful Snow Queen and King and are dazzled by the whirlwinds of Snowflakes.

—Intermission—

## ACT II

In the Land of Sweets, Clara and the Nutcracker Prince are greeted by the Sugar Plum Fairy. The Prince tells the story of the great battle for the Christmas tree and how Clara saved the day by thwarting the Rat King. To reward Clara for her heroic deeds, the Sugar Plum Fairy presents a suite of dances including Hot Chocolate, Coffee, Birdsong, Candy Cane, Marzipan, and wonderfully playful Polichinelles. A bouquet of Flowers performs a beautiful waltz, then the Sugar Plum Fairy dances with her Cavalier. After the grand finale, a very happy but tired Clara returns home to the comfort of the family parlor and dreams of her wonderful journey.



Clara and Drosselmeyer  
photo: © Richard Termine



Nutcracker and the Mouse King  
photo: Leighton Chen



Dance of the Snowflakes  
photo: Leighton Chen



Dewdrop and the Flowers  
photo: George Jones

The second act of *The Nutcracker* begins in the Land of Sweets, where Clara and the Prince are welcomed by the Sugar Plum Fairy. She entertains them with a celebration of dances, beginning with dances representing sweet delicacies from different countries. Though these foods and beverages may seem pretty ordinary today, when the ballet was created, they were considered rare delicacies—something that Clara would dream about as being special treats. The dancers' costumes resemble the treats they bring from their countries.

Here are the dances you will see in the Land of Sweets:

## HOT CHOCOLATE FROM SPAIN

## COFFEE FROM ARABIA

## BIRDSONG TEA FROM CHINA

## CANDY CANES FROM RUSSIA

## MARZIPAN FROM GERMANY -

Marzipan is a soft candy made from sugar and ground almonds.



Chocolate  
photo: Leighton Chen

## MOTHER GINGER AND HER POLICHINELLES

**WALTZ OF THE FLOWERS** - Dancers costumed as a bouquet of flowers and the Dew Drop Fairy dance for Clara and the Prince.

**GRAND PAS DE DEUX** - The Sugar Plum Fairy and Cavalier dance a beautiful classical grand pas de deux (dance for two people).

**FINALE** - The big Finale is danced by all of the Sweets.



Marzipan  
photo: Leighton Chen

## VISIONS OF SUGAR PLUMS

The Sugar Plum Fairy gets her name from a traditional Christmas treat from England. Despite the name, there are no plums in sugar plums. They are candies made from a seed, nut, or piece of spice coated with layers of hard sugar—like the crunchy outer shell of an M&M.



Candy Cane  
photo: Leighton Chen

## DANCES OF MANY LANDS

While you are watching the different dances in the Land of Sweets, pay attention to the costumes, the music, and the choreography. How are the dances the same? How are they different?

What kinds of dances have been passed down in your family? What countries do they come from? What do these dances look like? When do you dance them? Are there special shoes or costumes? What kind of music is played?

On a map, find the countries represented by the dances in the Land of Sweets. What do you know about each one?

Create a travel poster for the Land of Sweets. If you went there, what foods would you like to find?

Have you ever been away on a trip? Where did you go?

Where would you go if you could choose any fantasy or real place to visit?

## MEET THE COMPOSER

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) was a Russian composer and conductor. Born in Votkinsk, Russia, into a wealthy family, he began composing music at age 14. As his family wished, he went to law school, but gave up this career to study music at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. In 1866, he was hired as a professor at the Moscow Conservatory.



From the time he was a child, Tchaikovsky suffered from anxiety and depression, which was made worse by having to hide the fact that he was a homosexual. After a brief, unhappy marriage to a mentally unstable young woman, he attempted suicide.

*“Undoubtedly I would have gone mad were it not for music.”*

—Tchaikovsky

In 1877, a wealthy widow, Nadezhda von Meck, began supporting Tchaikovsky financially, which enabled him to devote all of his time to composing. She and Tchaikovsky wrote to each other nearly every day during their 15-year relationship, but she insisted that they never meet face-to-face.

Celebrated for his sweeping melodies and intense, emotional style, Tchaikovsky is also known for occasionally using traditional Russian folksongs and dances in his music. He composed works in many different genres, including operas, symphonies, piano and violin concertos. He is considered by many to be the greatest composer of music for ballet; in addition to *Nutcracker*, he wrote the music for the ballets *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. Outside of ballet, Tchaikovsky's best-known works are the 1812 Overture, Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture, Violin Concerto, Piano Concerto No. 1, Symphony No. 6 (the “Pathétique” Symphony), and the operas *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*. During his lifetime, Tchaikovsky was enormously popular throughout Europe and abroad. On a concert tour of America in 1891, he conducted some of his music at the very first performance at New York's Carnegie Hall.

The cause of Tchaikovsky's death, in 1893, is one of the great mysteries of music history. For many years it was believed he contracted cholera from drinking contaminated water, though these days there are any number of explanations and conspiracy theories—including arsenic poisoning, suicide, and even murder!

## LISTENING TO THE MUSIC

Listen to different parts of the music from *The Nutcracker*. For each selection:

- Describe the music: loud/soft, fast/slow, high/low, instruments, mood/emotion, etc.
- What kinds of feelings do you get from the music?
- What part of the story do you think goes with this music?
- What do you think the dancing will look like for this music? What kinds of movements? Can you show some of these movements using your body?

## HEAVENLY MUSIC

During the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy, listen closely for a musical instrument called a celesta (pronounced ‘suh-LESS-tuh’). The name comes from a French word that means ‘heavenly.’ The instrument looks like a piano and sounds like fairy bells or a music box.

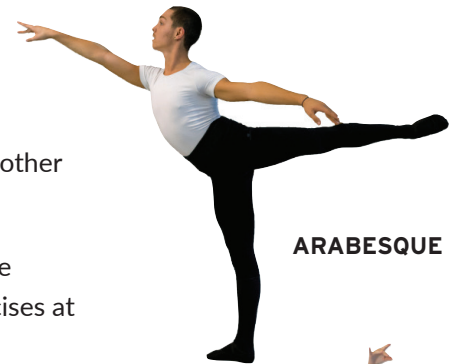


## A SWEET SUITE

Many people confuse the *Nutcracker* ballet with the *Nutcracker Suite*. A suite (pronounced ‘sweet’) is made up of portions of music from a ballet, opera, play, or film that are rearranged for an orchestra to play. For the *Nutcracker Suite*, Tchaikovsky took favorite sections of the music from the ballet and joined them together into a piece of music to be performed in concert—without the dancing. And so, you WATCH *The Nutcracker* ballet, but you LISTEN to the *Nutcracker Suite*!

Ballet began in France more than 300 years ago. For this reason, most of the vocabulary used in ballet today is French. Here are some common ballet terms:

**ARABESQUE** (are-ah-BESK) - a position where the dancer stands on one leg with the other leg stretched straight out behind, parallel to the floor



ARABESQUE

**ATTITUDE** (ah-tee-TUDE) - a position where the dancer stands on one leg with the other leg curved to the back



ATTITUDE

**BARRE** (bar) - a horizontal wooden bar fastened to the walls of the ballet studio. The dancer holds onto it for support while practicing. Every ballet class begins with exercises at the barre.

**CHAÎNÉS** (sheh-NAY) - a series of quick turns done moving forward in a straight line or circle

**CHASSÉ** (shah-SAY) - a series of steps where one foot "chases" the other across the floor

**CORPS DE BALLET** (CORE duh ba-LAY) - the dancers in a ballet who do not perform a solo part



EN POINTE

**DÉVELOPPÉ** (day-vlaw-PAY) - a move in which one leg is raised with the knee bent, then slowly extended into an open position

**EN POINTE** (ahn PWAHNT) - dancing on the tips of the toes. Dancing en pointe gives the impression of floating on the air. In ballet, only women dance en pointe.

**FOUETTÉ** (fweh-TAY) - a quick "whipping" movement of the raised leg, usually as part of a pirouette

**GRAND JÉTÉ** (GRON zhuh-TAY) - a broad, high leap with one leg stretched forward and the other back like a "split" in the air



GRAND JÉTÉ

**PAS DE DEUX** (PAH de DUH) - a dance for two people, usually a male and female. The pas de deux sections of a ballet usually express intense emotion, such as love, sadness, or joy.

**PORT DE BRAS** (por duh brah) - the way the arms are held and moved

**PIROUETTE** (peer-oo-WET) - a whirl or spin done on one foot

**PLIÉ** (plee-AY) - lowering the body by bending the knees

**TOUR JÉTÉ** (TOOR zhuh-TAY) - a jump from one foot to the other while making a half turn

**TURNOUT** - a basic ballet position where the feet and legs turn outward from the hips in a 90-degree angle

**TUTU** (too-too) - a costume worn by ballerinas. The skirt has many layers and can either be long and bell-shaped, or very short and stiff.

**VARIATION** - a solo dance



PLIÉ WITH  
TURNOUT

Ballet is a highly technical type of dance that takes years of study and practice to perform well. Dancers learn special techniques for executing the movements beautifully and with perfect precision—and for making it all look effortless! Besides training their bodies, ballet dancers have to learn a complicated movement vocabulary: the different body positions, movements, and patterns. One of the first things dancers are taught are the five basic foot and arm positions that are the building blocks of ballet.



FIRST POSITION



SECOND POSITION



THIRD POSITION



FOURTH POSITION



FIFTH POSITION

## STAYING ON YOUR TOES!

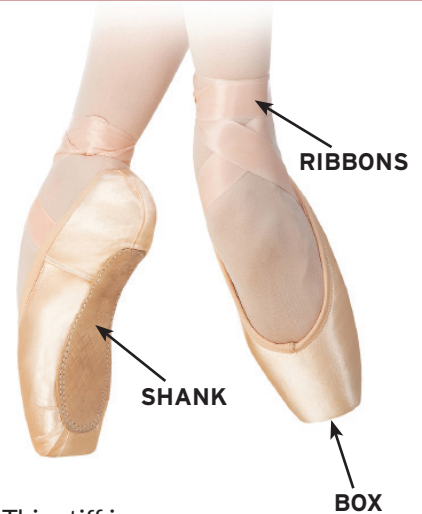
In the performance, you'll see some of the female dancers performing en pointe—on the tips of their toes. With this technique, the dancers appear to be floating. It takes years of special training for a dancer to be able to do all those steps and turns while balanced on the ends of her toes. Girls usually begin to dance en pointe when they are 11 or 12, when their bones are hard enough and their muscles in their feet and legs are strong enough to support their full weight en pointe.

Ballerinas wear special shoes—pointe shoes—that are designed to help them dance en pointe. The parts of a pointe shoe are:

**RIBBONS** - Hold the shoe on the foot. They are made of cloth and tied with a special flat knot. The ribbons are crossed over the ankle to help give support—just the way athletes strap up their ankles with tape.

**SHANK** - The “backbone” of the shoe. This stiff inner sole is made of heavy leather. The shank helps transfer the dancer’s weight from the toes into the arch, which is the strongest part of the foot.

**BOX** - Made of layers of cloth hardened with glue. The front end of the box is flattened to help the dancer balance. The stiff inner shell protects the dancer’s toes, softening the impact of steps and jumps.





Ballet tells stories using just the body—the performers do not speak. In some ballets, you will occasionally see the dancers stop their leaps and twirls to act out parts of the story with gestures and facial expressions. This is called **MIME**. Mime helps the audience understand what is happening and what characters are thinking and feeling. Ballet has a whole vocabulary of mime gestures that help dancers tell the story

In *The Nutcracker*, one place to look for mime is at the beginning of Act II when the Prince tells the story of the battle between the rat-and-mouse army and the toy soldiers. Without using words, only through pantomime, he describes how Clara saved his life by throwing her shoe at the Rat King.



“Let’s go,” gestures the Prince.  
photo: George Jones

## MIME VOCABULARY

**AFRAID:** Hold out arms with palms facing forward.



AFRAID

**ANGER:** Shake fist strongly.



DEATH

**BEAUTIFUL:** Hand circles face.

**DANCING:** Roll hands from front of body to overhead.

**DEATH:** Arms straight in front, crossed at wrists with hands in fists.

**I/ME/MINE:** Hand points to chest to indicate oneself.

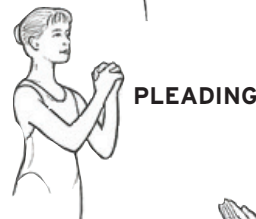


I PROMISE

**I PROMISE:** Place one hand on chest and raise the other arm in the air with three fingers pointing up.

**LOVE:** Hands over heart.

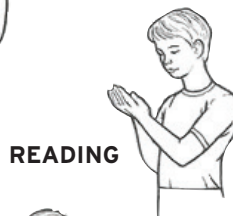
**MARRIAGE:** Index finger points to ring finger of left hand.



PLEADING

**MONEY:** Rub thumb and fingers of one hand together.

**NO/NEVER:** Palms down, hands wave over each other, crossing at wrist.



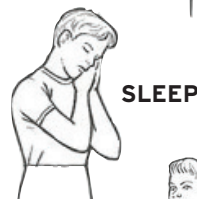
READING

**OBEY:** Point strongly to floor with index finger.

**PLEADING:** Clasp hands together in begging gesture.

**READING:** Open hands with palms up like an open book.

**SAD:** Fingers trace tears down cheek or wipe away tears.



SLEEP

**SLEEP:** Rest cheek on hand with palms together.

**THINK:** Touch or point to temple.

**WHY?:** Hold out arms with palms facing up.



WHY?

## EXPLORING PANTOMIME

How is pantomime different from dance? How can you use gestures and facial expressions to create different characters?

Explore ways of communicating without talking. Without speaking, can you say ‘yes,’ ‘no,’ ‘I don’t know,’ ‘hello,’ ‘goodbye’?

Try saying ‘yes’ using different body parts. Experiment with changing the speed and the energy (tense, relaxed, heavy, light, smooth, choppy, etc.) of your movements.

Without speaking, perform one of the gestures from the mime vocabulary for the rest of your class and see if they can guess the meaning. Then create a brief “sentence” using pantomime and perform it for your class.

Listen to selections of Tchaikovsky’s music for *Nutcracker*. Create a pantomime that expresses how the music makes you feel.

Dancers are not just performers—they are elite athletes. They have amazing flexibility, muscular strength and both physical and mental endurance. They are able to leap, land, and turn with grace.

To stay in top condition, professional ballet dancers follow a rigorous training routine. A typical day starts early with a 90-minute class to warm up and work on their technique. Class is followed by four to six hours of rehearsals, sometimes followed by an evening performance.

Training to become a professional ballet dancer starts at about seven. Dancers can usually perform into their early to late 30s—sometimes a little longer. After retiring from performing, some dancers continue their career in ballet as teachers or choreographers.



The Prince  
photo: Richard Termine



Sugar Plum Fairy  
photo: Leighton Chen

## FUN FACTS

The average NBA player can jump 2½ feet in the air. Ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov was said to have jumped 5-6 feet in the air.

Based on a U.S. Department of Labor database, the most physically demanding job is professional dancer. It ranked higher than fitness trainer and aerobics instructor (#2), forest firefighter (#5), and competitive athlete (#7).

To keep from getting dizzy when they do all those amazingly fast spins, ballet dancers are taught a trick called “spotting.” Before they begin turning, they find a fixed object to look at—a clock, a door, a light. Then they try to keep looking at it as they spin around and around. Ice skaters use the same trick.

## MEN IN BALLET

When a lot of people think of ballet, they think of women in frilly tutus, dancing gracefully on the tips of their toes. But ballet dancing is not just for women and girls. As a matter of fact, for part of ballet’s history, women were not even allowed to appear on stage!

Ballet was born in the 15th century in the royal courts of Italy and France. Up until about 1680, all the dancers were male—female roles were danced by men wearing masks and women’s clothing. By the 19th century, however, women dancers dominated the ballet stage. In the early 1900s, Vaslav Nijinsky—one of the greatest dancers of all time—set the stage for other male dancers, including Rudolf Nureyev, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Edward Villella, and Carlos Acosta. They showed that men could be ballet superstars, too!

Part of a critic's or reviewer's job is to give someone who was not at the performance an idea of what it was like, whether the reviewer liked it, and whether someone else should see it. On a personal level, writing about a performance also helps us reflect in a thoughtful way about what we've seen.

## DURING THE PERFORMANCE

While you are watching the *The Nutcracker* performance, pay close attention so you can give a detailed account of the show in your review. Keep these questions in mind:

- What do you see? Observe the entire visual environment—not only the choreography and the dancers' performances, but also the sets, costumes, lighting, and the theater space
- What do you hear? This includes the music as well as any sounds you hear as the audience reacts to the performance.
- What does the performance make me think of? Is there anything I see or hear that reminds me of something else (for example, sports, animals, movies, personal experiences)?

## AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Write your review, using the following questions as a guide:

- Did I like the performance? Why or why not? Were there specific parts I especially liked or disliked? What were they?
- How did the performance make me feel?
- Would I send a friend to see this show?
- Was I tired or hungry at the show, or was I having a bad day? Did it affect the way I reacted to the show?
- What about the show made the strongest impression? What do I think I will remember about the performance a month from now?
- How can I communicate what I saw and heard so anyone reading my review will have a clear picture of the performance? What are some adjectives that come to mind when I think about the show? What words from the ballet vocabulary can I use in my description?



Soldiers  
photo: Leighton Chen



photo: Jason Paddock

## BE A GOOD AUDIENCE MEMBER

Going to see a show at the theater is not the same as going to a movie or watching TV. The performers will be right there with you and the rest of the audience, which makes it very exciting! It also means you have a special responsibility to respect the performers and the rest of the audience so that everyone can enjoy the show. Make sure to follow these rules:

- **If you have a phone, make sure to turn it off before the show starts. Keep it off until the show is over.**
- **During the show, give the performers all your attention. Stay in your seat and don't talk.**
- **Taking pictures or recording the show is not allowed.**

## WATCH AND LISTEN

During the performance, pay attention to the different theater elements used in the show. These include:

**MUSIC** - Pay attention to the music, and the way it helps set the mood for what's happening in the show. When does it sound exciting? Sad? Funny?

**COSTUMES** - Do the actors' costumes look the same or different from the way the characters look in the TV show? Do the costumes help you recognize the characters in the play?

**LIGHTING** - Notice how the lights onstage change during the show. They get brighter and darker, change colors, move around, and do other things.

**SETS/SCENERY** - Pay attention to the scenery. Does it look like the TV show? Notice how the actors move the scenery around during the show.

## BOOKS

*Appreciating Dance: A Guide to the World's Liveliest Art*, by Harriet Lihs. Princeton Book Company, 2009. A comprehensive guide to all forms of dance. Includes questions for discussion.

*Ballet School*, by Naia Bray-Moffatt and David Handley. DK Children, 2003. Grades K-3.

*The Nutcracker*, by E. T. A. Hoffmann; Ralph Manheim (translator), Maurice Sendak (illustrator). Crown Publishing, 2001.

## VIDEO

*George Balanchine's The Nutcracker*. New York City Ballet production featuring Darci Kistler and Damian Woetzel, narrated by Kevin Kline. Warner Home Video, 1997.

*The Nutcracker*. American Ballet Theatre production featuring Mikhail Baryshnikov and Gelsey Kirkland. Kultur Vide, 2004.

*The Hard Nut*. A modern adaptation of *The Nutcracker* by Mark Morris. Nonesuch, 2007.



photo: © Julieta Cervantes

## MUSIC

*The Nutcracker* (complete ballet music), by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Kirov Orchestra and Choir, Valery Gergiev, conductor. Polygram.



*The Nutcracker Suite*, by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn. Such Sweet Thunder, 1999. A jazz rendering of themes from Tchaikovsky's ballet score.

## WEBSITES

American Ballet Theatre's Ballet Dictionary. Features video clips illustrating the dance terms.

[www.abt.org/education/dictionary/index.html](http://www.abt.org/education/dictionary/index.html)

American Repertory Ballet

[www.arballet.org](http://www.arballet.org)

Princeton Ballet School

[www.arballet.org/princeton-ballet-school/](http://www.arballet.org/princeton-ballet-school/)

*Nutcracker* ballet website

[www.nutcrackerballet.net](http://www.nutcrackerballet.net)



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