WELCOME

The Northwest Florida Ballet is proud to present the 39th annual production of *The Nutcracker* with live music by the Northwest Florida Ballet Symphony Orchestra. This study guide contains a variety of information about the production as well as theater etiquette, ballet terminology and several activities to engage your students prior to attending the performance. On behalf of NFB, thank you for taking the time to introduce a beloved art form to your students. Ballet is a cultural experience like none other and we are so pleased you have taken the time to share it with the next generation. We appreciate your support and look forward to seeing you at the theater.

CEO/Artistic Director:
Todd Eric Allen

A native of Fort Walton Beach, Florida, Todd Eric Allen was a scholarship student at the Joffery School of Ballet in New York City for five years. He also attended Virginia Intermont College where he was awarded the 1985 Dance Magazine Scholarship to the Choreographers Conference.

Mr. Allen has danced with Louisville Ballet, Boston Ballet, and Les Grands Ballets Canadienes, and has performed as a guest artist and teacher throughout the United States. He has performed featured roles in ballets by Twyla Tharp, Mark Morris, Jiri Kylian, Nacho Duato, and James Kudelka, and has performed with the Broadway cast of Movin’ Out in New York City. Mr. Allen has been praised for his choreography work for Boston Ballet, Rhode Island Festive Ballet, Sarasota Ballet and NBA Ballet in Tokyo, Japan.

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Located in the Sybil Lebherz Center for Dance Education in beautiful downtown Fort Walton Beach, Fla.

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NUTCRACKER STORY SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Guests are arriving for a Christmas Eve party at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Stahlbaum and their children, Clara and Fritz. Clara’s godfather, the eccentric Herr Drosselmeyer, arrives with toys for all the children and a mysterious vision of something special in store for Clara. With the party in progress, Drosselmeyer produces another wonderful surprise, life-size dolls, which dance to the children’s delight. He then presents Clara with a special gift, a wooden nutcracker in the shape of a soldier, a strange gift for a little girl; but Clara falls in love with the doll and proudly shows it to everyone. Fritz, wanting the Nutcracker for himself, breaks the doll. Clara is heartbroken, but Drosselmeyer fixes the Nutcracker to everyone’s relief.

As the party comes to an end, the Stahlbaum children are sent off to bed. Clara, however, is too excited to sleep, and she sneaks downstairs to be with her new Nutcracker doll. Strange things begin to happen. Huge mice almost as big as she, scurry across the floor. The clock strikes midnight and her whole house begins to transform. The Christmas tree grows to an enormous size, and a great battle ensues between the mice, led by the Mouse King, and the Nutcracker, now life-sized, leading an army of toy soldiers. It looks as though the Mouse King might win the battle when, just in time, Clara steps in and hits him with her shoe, distracting him so that the Nutcracker can kill him. The mice carry off their fallen leader. The Nutcracker transforms into a Prince and leads Clara on a fantastic journey, which begins with the wintry Kingdom of Snow. In the final tableau, the entire Snow Kingdom sends Clara on to the Sugar Plum Fairy’s palace in the magical Kingdom of the Sweets.

ACT II

The scene opens in the palace of the Sugar Plum Fairy, where everyone is gathering to welcome Clara. As the Angels move about the palace, the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier meet Clara and the Nutcracker Prince and call all the characters to enter for a royal greeting. In the language of mime, the Nutcracker Prince describes to all assembled how the fearless Clara helped to win the battle with the Mouse King. Then the Sugar Plum Fairy arranges a great party with grand
entertainment. Dancers from far away places like China, Spain, Arabia and Russia have come to perform for Clara. The Reed Flutes dance and Mother Ginger is there with her sixteen children! The Dew Drop Fairy leads the beautiful Waltz of the Flowers, and then the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier perform the most beautiful dance of all. Finally, all the characters gather to say goodbye to Clara and send her on her journey home.

ABOUT THE COMPOSER: PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky was born in Kamsko-Votinsk, Russia, on May 7, 1840. He was a very bright child who could read Russian, French, and German by the time he was six years old. He hated physical exercise, did not like to wash, and did not care about the way he looked or what he wore. Peter’s interest in music was so strong that his governess became concerned because it was unusual for a child so young. If he could not find a piano to try out the music he made up, he would use his fingers to tap out his tunes on the windowpanes of his house. Once while doing this, he tapped so hard on the glass that the window broke, leaving him with a serious cut on his hand.

Peter began taking piano lessons when he was six years old. After attending boarding school, he studied law and mathematics and took a job as a clerk in the Ministry of Justice. After just four years, he quit to attend music school full time to study composing. He was soon invited to teach class. Tchaikovsky was a nervous, unhappy man all his life, yet his beautiful music made him the most popular of all the Russian composers. He wrote the music for three of the most famous ballets of all time, the Nutcracker, Swan Lake, and the Sleeping Beauty. He traveled to the United States, where he conducted several concerts. In his lifetime, he wrote nine operas, six symphonies, four concertos and three string quartets, as well as numerous songs, suites, and overtures.

One of his most famous pieces, The 1812 Overture, uses cannons and church bells and is often played on the 4th of July. Tchaikovsky was only 53 when he died in St. Petersburg in 1893. He had just completed his sixth symphony, which he felt was the best piece of music he ever created.
**BALLET 101: POSITION OF THE FEET & ARMS**

1. **Heels together, toes pointing in opposing directions, creating a straight line.**

2. **Heels approximately ten inches apart, toes pointing in opposing directions.**

3. **Feet parallel, heel of front foot touching middle of back foot.**

4. **Feet parallel, front foot approximately eight inches in front of back foot.**

5. **Feet parallel, front and back foot touching at toes and heels.**

**Preparatory.** Arms dropped, elbows slightly rounded so that the arm does not touch the body, hands close but not touching.

1. **Arms raised at the level of the diaphragm, elbows slightly bent, hands close but not touching.**

2. **Arms opened to the sides, shoulders not drawn back or raised, hands at the level of the elbow.**

3. **Arms raised above, but just in front of the head, elbows rounded, hands close but not touching. Hands should be visible without raising the head.**

**A Note on Hands:** In her *Basic Principles of Classical Ballet*, Agrippina Vaganova says, “The manner of holding the hands...is very difficult to describe...All fingers are grouped freely and they are soft in their joints; the thumb touches the middle finger; the wrist is not bent, but the hand continues the general curved line of the arm from the shoulder.”
Ballet Vocabulary

Accent: A strong movement or gesture.

Balance: A state of equilibrium referring to the balance of weight or the spatial arrangement of bodies.

Ballet: A classical Western dance form that originated in the Renaissance courts of Europe. By the time of Louis XIV (mid-1600s), steps and body positions underwent codification.

Ballerina: A female ballet dancer of the highest ranking.

Barre [bar]: The place where a dancer goes to begin his/her class work. The barre is a long pole that gives the dancer support. After the dancer has done barre work to warm up, he/she will move to the center the classroom or studio to practice increasingly complex steps.

Choreographer: One who creates and composes dances by arranging or inventing steps, movements, and patterns of movements.

Composer: One who writes music.

Corps de ballet [kawr duh ba-LAY]: A group of dancers who work together as an ensemble. They form the background for the ballerina and her partner and are the backbone of any ballet company.

Gesture: The movement of a body part or combination of parts, with emphasis on the expressive aspects of the move. It includes all movements of the body not supporting weight.

Libretto: The text on which a ballet is choreographed; the story of a ballet.

Motif: A distinctive and recurring gesture used to provide a theme or unifying idea.

Pantomime: The art of telling a story, expressing a mood or an emotion or describing an action without words.

Pas de Deux [pah duh DU]: a dance for two people, traditionally between a ballerina and the male dancer of the highest ranking.

Pointe Shoes: Shoes worn by female dancers that enable them to dance on the tips of their toes. The area covering the toe is made of layers of fabric glued together in the shape of a “box” covered in satin and hardened. The sole is made of hard leather to prevent the shoe from breaking when bent. To keep the shoes on tightly, the dancers sew satin ribbons and elastic to the sides and tie the ribbons securely around their ankles. A pair of pointe shoes may only last for 3 to 4 days of work.
**Rehearse:** To practice.

**Technique:** The physical skills of a dancer that enable him or her to execute the steps and movements required in different dances. Different styles or genres of dance often have specific techniques.

**Tempo:** The speed of music or a dance.

**Turnout:** The ability of the dancer to turn their feet and legs outward from the hip joints to close to a 180-degree position.

**Tutu:** Ballet skirt, usually made of net or tulle. Tutus may be of varying lengths. While the style and mood of the ballet help to determine the preferred tutu length, the dancer’s technique is most clearly visible when she wears a short tutu.

*More ballet terms can be found at [www.abt.org/education/dictionary/index.html](http://www.abt.org/education/dictionary/index.html)*

**STAGE MAKEUP**

Just like opera or theater, ballet is an art of illusion. One special ingredient that helps us to see the dancers better on stage is makeup. Applying theatrical makeup is something that all dancers learn. In a large theater where the stage lights are very bright, a dancer’s face looks washed out and can’t be seen clearly by the audience without the aid of some special effects.

False eyelashes and dark eyeliner emphasize the eyes and make them look large. Adding color to the cheeks and dark lipstick defines the rest of the dancer’s face. If you met a dancer wearing stage makeup, you would think it looked too heavy. But from our seats in the theater, the dancers’ faces appear normal and not at all exaggerated.

In ballet both men and women wear makeup. This often helps a dancer to portray their character. When a young dancer has to perform the role of a grandfather, for example, makeup, a wig, and a false moustache will make him look years older. Through the magic of makeup dancers can look like witches, toys, or even animals. Normally dancers apply their own makeup, but sometimes the makeup for these roles is so tricky that a special makeup artist is needed to create the character’s face.
In the hour and a half before the curtain goes up, all dancers perform very personal routines. This includes putting on their makeup, preparing their shoes, warming up at the barre, and at the last moment, putting on their costumes. Then, the orchestra starts to play and the performance begins.

COSTUMES

When we think of a ballerina we usually picture a lovely woman with a sparkling crown on her head wearing a beautiful costume of satin and jewels. The costumes’ skirt is short, full and flares outward. This is a tutu. Ballerinas have worn the tutus that we know today for more than a hundred years. In the earliest days of ballet, when members of the royal courts of Europe danced ballet, dancers wore variations on the formal clothing of their day. As ballerinas were able to perform more interesting and difficult footwork, skirts became lighter and shorter so the audience could see their legs and feet.

However, the tutu is only one kind of ballet costume. There are many different types of costumes for both the ballerina and the danseur, the male ballet dancer. There are tights and leotards, long romantic dresses, jackets and peasant skirts, to name just a few. Costumes often describe the character a dancer is portraying – a prince or a princess, sailor or a beautiful white swan. Costumes add a feeling or mood to the dance by their color or design. A costume can give you a sense of the time and place of a ballet. Are the dancers wearing colorful Chinese pajamas, elegant ball gowns with long white gloves, or bright military uniforms?
After talking to the choreographer, it is the job of the costume designer to draw sketches, choose fabrics and create all of the costumes for the ballet. The Costume Shop will buy material, dye it, sew it and decorate it. The designer must always remember that the dancers need to move freely and easily in their costumes.

Dancers try on their costumes before they perform in them to be sure that they fit securely. Since many different dancers often perform the same role, costumes have rows of snaps and hooks so that they can be easily adjusted for each dancer.

Costumes add to the spectacle of a ballet. But most importantly they must help us see the choreography and the dancer’s movements.

**POINTE SHOE FAQ**

**What are pointe shoes made of?**
There are many different companies who produce pointe shoes, and therefore many ways of making them. However, contrary to popular belief, pointe shoes are not made of wood or metal. The area around a dancer’s toes is called the box, and is usually made out of a plaster-like material, which is applied in several layers. A leather sole backs the shoe.

**How do dancers personalize their shoes?**
Each dancer sews her own ribbons onto her shoe, to place them according to her preference. Also, most dancers darn or even burn the edges of the box (or platform) to give themselves better balance and decrease slipping. To make the sole and box more flexible, dancers may bend the shoes, and bang them on the wall or floor.

**Do they hurt?**
Yes and no. If a dancer is strong and trained well enough to dance *en pointe*, and has the proper shoe for her foot, pointework should not cause bleeding or disfigurement. However, dancing *en pointe* up to eight hours per day is bound to wear on a ballerina’s feet. Some dancers choose to put small lamb’s wool pads over their toes. The amount of pain a dancer endures also depends on the construction of the foot itself. For example, dancers with toes that are relatively equal in length have the advantage of more support.
How long do they last?
Pointe shoes break down very quickly with frequent use. A ballerina may need a new pair of pointe shoes after each performance of a full-length ballet. In fact, Evelyn Cisneros, former Prima Ballerina at San Francisco Ballet, says that at least three pairs are required to get through Swan Lake. It is possible that a professional dancer will need a new pair each week.

How much do they cost?
Since pointe shoes are painstakingly hand made and often imported, they can cost upwards of $90 per pair.

When does a dancer begin dancing en pointe?
It is important that a ballet student does not begin dancing en pointe too early, before the bones in her ankles have finished growing. Therefore, the age at which dancers begin pointework varies. However, it is usually around 11 years old.

When did ballerinas begin dancing en pointe?
Marie Taglioni is attributed with performing a full-length ballet en pointe for the first time, when her father created the role of La Sylphide for her in 1832. However, her shoe was most likely just a satin slipper with a leather sole, darned at the ends. Without a firm box for support, dancers from this period must have relied heavily on their strength, and suffered quite a bit. In some cases, wires were rigged onstage to carry ballerinas in a manner that resembled flight. The light, ethereal appearance of the ballerina en pointe effectively launched the Romantic Era of ballet.

HOW TO BE A GOOD THEATER AUDIENCE

Unlike actors on your television, performers on the stage are aware of their audience and want very much to communicate their art to you, and feel your appreciation in return. By the time you arrive at a theatre for a scheduled performance, many people (choreographers, composers, dancers, technicians, costume and lighting designers, etc.) have worked very hard to bring you their best efforts. In order to show respect for those efforts, every audience member must give the performance their full attention and avoid any behavior that interferes with anyone else doing the same.

We have rules that help us accomplish this goal, and you should do your best to understand and follow them:

1. Always arrive at the theatre with plenty of time to find your seats and settle down into them. Late arrivals mean disruption for everyone else, including the performers.

2. No shoving or running in the lobby.
3. No cameras or video recorders. Flashes are dangerous for dancers and unapproved photos and videos violate copyright laws.

4. No hooting, whistling or yelling during the performance. The performance has begun when anyone on stage starts talking or dancing, or when the orchestra starts playing. You are welcome to show your appreciation for the performance with applause at the end of the ballet or sometimes at the end of a section or solo. You are also welcome to laugh if someone on stage is being intentionally funny.

5. No talking or whispering during the performance. You will have plenty of time to discuss your impressions at intermission or after the show.

6. No gum, candy or food in the theatre (it makes noise and sticky messes, and the Mattie Kelly Arts Center is so beautiful!).

7. Use the bathroom before the show begins or at intermission, not during the performance.

8. The screens on the seatbacks that help you follow the ballet are expensive technology. Once you have pressed the button to see the text, please do not touch or scratch the screens.

9. Enjoy!

ACTIVITIES

Below we have provided two activities that you can conduct with your students after you attend the performance. The activities are appropriate for a wide variety of ages and can easily be customized to fit your needs.

POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY #1: Performance Review

When a critic writes a review of a ballet or any other type of performance, he/she is careful to explain what elements are being critiqued. They are providing an opinion of the experience from a personal perspective and explaining why they feel the way that they do. In this activity, students will write a review of the Nutcracker, answering a few or all of the following questions:

- How would you describe the ballet? How was the dancing? The costumes? The music?
- How did the story affect you? Were you sad, or happy? When and why?
• Who were the best dancers? The best characters?
• Did the production meet with your expectations, or were you disappointed? Why?

POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY #2: Letter to a Dancer

In this activity you are encouraging your students to write a letter to your favorite dancer from The Nutcracker, describing how they felt about the production and the dancer’s performance. Encourage your students to ask questions and remind them that dancers love to hear from audience members. Please address all envelopes as follows:

Northwest Florida Ballet
c/o Education & Outreach
310 Perry Ave.
Fort Walton Beach, FL 32548

*Students should address the letter to a specific dancer either by name (from the playbill) or by character in the greeting. NFB staff will coordinate delivery of the letters to the dancers. If questions are presented, please be sure to have the student include the school’s address and your name at the bottom of the letter in order for us to respond.*