



## Curriculum Guide for The Nutcracker Ballet

Goals for this lesson plan include:

1. Students will learn vocabulary for old fashioned, theater and ballet terms they may not be familiar with.
2. Students will become familiar with a book version of the Nutcracker Story (recommend The Nutcracker by Janet Schulman, E.T.A. Hoffman and Renee Graef. ISBN 978-0060278144).
  - a. Students will be able to describe Clara/Marie, Godfather Drosselmeyer, Nutcracker prince, and the Sugar Plum Fairy relying on descriptors such as beautiful, mysterious, handsome, brave, kind, and generous.
  - b. Students will be able to draw or write a reaction to the story using a prompt such as “My favorite part of the Nutcracker story is....”
3. Students will learn what to expect at a ballet performance.
4. Students will see excerpts of the Nutcracker Ballet performed by the Kansas Ballet.
  - a. Students will reflect on their experience of the ballet, using a series of discussion, drawing or writing prompts.
  - b. Students will critique the performance of the Nutcracker Ballet.
  - c. Students will compare and contrast the ballet and the book version of the Nutcracker.
5. Through music (audio cd Pytor Ilych Tchaikovsky: The Nutcracker – Complete Ballet or Tchaikovsky: The Nutcracker (Complete): Swan Lake Suite), students will learn how various styles, rhythms, and instruments set the mood for the musical piece. Also, how each piece can be traced to a difference country.

## Story Vocabulary

**Godfather** – a man, usually a relative or close friend of the family, who is a special person in a child's life. In the past, he would help parents with a child's education. In times when people did not live as long as they do now, he might be like a grandfather if the child had no surviving grandparents. A woman who enjoyed this special relationship would be a "godmother".

**Grandfather Clock** – a very tall clock; the clock face sits on top of a tall, narrow case which holds the clock's pendulum, which swings back and forth to help the clock keep time. These clocks would ring or chime on the hour, with the number of chimes for the hour. For example, at eight o'clock, a grandfather clock would ring 8 times. Old-fashioned grandfather clocks would need to be wound daily to keep the correct time.

**Herr** – the German equivalent of Mr.

**Marzipan** - a type of candy made of almond paste, sugar, and egg whites. It can be molded into shapes like fruits, hearts, or stars, etc. Traditionally, it is white.

**Nutcracker** – a wooden tool, often in the shape of a man, used to break the shells of nuts. Nuts in their shells would be inserted into the nutcracker's "mouth", then a lever on his "back" could be turned to bring his "jaws" together to break the shells and the nut pieces removed. In the 1800's, especially in Germany, but also in other places, nutcrackers were painted bright colors and given to children to help them break the shells of the nuts they received in the Christmas stockings.

**Overture** - When the house lights dim, and music begins to play, this is the overture. It signals the start of a performance where music is an important part of the story. It is a sampling of the music that will be heard throughout the story. There will be no action on stage during the overture, which lasts several minutes.

**Saber** – a type of sword with a curved blade

**Waltz** – a dance which is fast moving (3/4 time). Dancers appear to glide lightly and effortlessly around the stage. At a formal ball, this would be a dance for couples.

**Wind-up Toy** – a mechanical toy. In the days before batteries, such toys had to be wound up usually by turning a key to set the mechanism inside the toys. Such toys make a clicking or clattering sound (similar to a clock's ticking) as they moved about; at first the clicking was fast, but as the toy "wound down", it became slower and slower until it stopped.



## Theater Vocabulary

**Applause** – hand-clapping by audience to thank the performers for their work.

**Audience** – the people who come to watch a performance.

**Auditorium** – the area in which the seats for the audience are located.

**Curtains** – made of fabric. The main curtain across the front of the stage hides the stage area until the performance begins, or until the scene changes are completed. Curtains along the sides and back of the stage hide backstage areas from the audience.

**Dressing rooms** – the rooms where performers change their clothes. Men and women have separate dressing rooms.

**Drop** – large pieces of canvas that extend the width of the stage. They are hung on rods at the back of the stage. They can be painted to show different scenes. A series of drops may be used in a production, which will be raised and lowered into view when needed.

**Gel** (short for gelatin) – a transparent colored sheet which is inserted into a frame in front of spotlights to change the color of the light.

**House Lights** – the lights in the auditorium, where the audience sits. When these lights dim, the performance is about to begin.

**Make-up** – used by performers to help create their character's appearance. Stage make-up is much heavier than regular make-up. Make-up can help create wrinkles to make a young performer appear older. In the Nutcracker Ballet, make-up is used to give certain characters a distinctive appearance, like Godfather Drosselmeyer's mechanical dolls in the party scene.

**Scenery** – used to help the audience imagine the setting of a story. The Nutcracker uses a kind of hanging scenery called a drop. This is a large piece of canvas, as wide as the stage, with a scene painted on it.

**Spotlight** – one type of lighting instrument which is used to focus audience attention on a very limited area of the stage with a concentrated beam of light; reflectors help increase its brightness.

**Stage** – the area of the theater, usually in front, where the performance takes place.

**Stage lighting** – there are three kinds of stage lighting used to illuminate the stage; 1) general lighting provides light for the entire stage, including background elements like scenery and backdrops (drops); 2) specific lighting concentrates on a particular area of the stage, usually to emphasize the acting area; 3) special effects can include the projections of patterns on the stage floor, like those used to represent light filtering through tree branches.

**Wings** – the areas to the side of the stage, out of sight of the audience. These areas are where performers wait to make their entrance onto the stage and into the action.



## Ballet Vocabulary

**Ballet** – a form of theatrical dance (meant to be watched) that uses particular movements and poses. No words are spoken. The story is told through music and movements.

**Ballerina** – a female ballet dancer. This term once referred to the star female dancer in a company; now it means any female ballet dancer.

**Corps de Ballet** – ballet dancers who perform as a group. In the Nutcracker, the Waltz of the Flowers is performed by the corps de ballet.

**Costumes** – outfits appropriate to characters worn by performers. Sugar Plum Fairy wears a sparkling white tutu to help you imagine her as a fairy. The mice wear gray costumes and heads that look like mice. Male ballet dancers often wear leotards and tights as part of their costumes; they dress this way because of ballet's origins in the Renaissance, when men actually dressed in hose and short pants for everyday wear.

**Danseur** – a male ballet dancer.

**Divertissement** – a dance or series of dances which show a dancer's skill. These occur in many story ballets, but they may not relate to the events of the story. In the Nutcracker, the "country" dances of Act II (Spanish, Arabian, Chinese, Russian, Marzipan, Mother Ginger) are divertissement.

**En Pointe** – when a ballerina stands on the tips of her toe or pointe shoes, she is said to be "en pointe".

**Jete** – a kind of jump in ballet, in which the dancer jumps from one foot to the other, kicking out with one leg. A Grand Jete is a large leap forward from one foot to the other.

**Leotard** – tightly knit, form fitting garment worn by both men and women in a ballet.

**Pantomime** – a form of acting in which gestures and facial expressions are used to convey the story. Ballet dancers frequently use pantomime to help tell the story of a ballet.

**Pas de deux** – a ballet dance for a couple.

**Pirouette** – ballet turn in which the dancer turns around completely on one foot.

**Pointe shoes** –Special ballet shoes worn by ballerinas to allow them to dance on the points of their toes. These slippers have a hardened box, which is made of 7 layers of fabric glued together. This box goes around the toes to help support and protect the tips of the ballerina’s toes. Ribbons help to keep the shoes on the feet. But the ballerina’s feet also get support from her ankle and leg muscles. She has trained for years with special exercises to strengthen her legs, ankles and feet. Student dancers should not wear pointe shoes until age 10 or 11.

**Port de bras** – the arm movements of ballet. Literally it means the carriage of the arms.

**Spotting** – a technique in which dancers pick a spot to look at as they turn to keep from getting dizzy. As they turn, they quickly turn their head around so they are always looking at the same spot in the room. It takes a lot of practice to master this technique.

**Tights** – tightly knit leg coverings worn by both men and women in ballet.

**Tutu** – a ballerina’s skirt, made of several layers of fine net-like fabric called tulle (pronounced tool).



## Students will become familiar with a book version of the Nutcracker Story

### Note on Naming Traditions:

Why is the heroine's name "Marie" in the book and "Clara" in the ballet? In many book versions of The Nutcracker, the main character is named "Marie." This is because of twists and turns in the evolution of the Nutcracker tale. The first version of the Nutcracker story was published by the German author E.T.A. Hoffman in 1816. Hoffman's somewhat dark tale centers on a girl named Clara, who is not the cherished daughter of the ballet, but an unloved and neglected orphan living in the house of relatives. She bravely copes with the hard work she is required to do in the household and the fact that she is unappreciated. She does have a mysterious godfather, Dr. Drosselmeyer, who watches out for her and gives her gifts of warm clothing and other presents to help brighten her dreary life. One Christmas, he gives Clara a Nutcracker doll. This Nutcracker is really his beloved nephew, who is under an evil spell that only true love can break. Clara's love for her Nutcracker breaks the spell and turns him back into a young man. They eventually marry.

In 1847, the French writer Alexandre Dumas, father of the more famous writer of the same name, retold Hoffman's story, removing some of its darker elements. He renamed his heroine "Marie." Marie's love for her Nutcracker frees him from the evil spell and they marry to live happily ever after. This version of the story is the one on which The Nutcracker Ballet is based.

Four decades later, Russian readers were familiar with Dumas' story. The director of the Russian Imperial Ballet decided to stage a ballet based on Dumas' telling of the Nutcracker story. His chief choreographer, Marius Petipa, directed composer Peter Tchaikovsky to write music for the "scenes" that he developed. Petipa moved on to other projects, so his assistant, Lev Ivanov, developed the choreography for that first ballet version of The Nutcracker. The ballet, with the heroine named "Clara" again, premiered at St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theater in 1892.

Because of the way the ballet developed from not one, but two book versions, the heroine of the story can be known as either "Marie" or "Clara." Most book versions call her "Marie;" in most ballets, she is known as "Clara."

**Students will be able to describe Clara/Marie, Godfather Drosselmeyer, Nutcracker prince, and the Sugar Plum Fairy relying on descriptors such as beautiful, handsome, mysterious, brave, kind, generous.**

Discuss some of the following with your students:

- Where does the story take place?
- When does it take place?
- Who is the main character of the story? What is she like/how would you describe her?
- Who are some of the other characters? (Students' focus should be directed to Godfather Drosselmeyer, Nutcracker Prince, Sugar Plum Fairy) What is each like/how would you describe him/her? What do they do in the story?
- What is Clara's special present?
- What strange things happen at midnight? What happens to Clara's Nutcracker?
- How does Clara save the Nutcracker?
- Where does the Prince take Clara?
- How do the inhabitants of the Land of Sweets celebrate their Prince's return?
- How does the story end?

**Students will be able to draw or write a reaction to the story using a prompt such as "My favorite part of the Nutcracker story is . . ."**

Provide a prompt for illustrating or writing a reaction to the story. Some sample prompts include:

- "My favorite part of the Nutcracker story is . . ."
- "The scariest part of the Nutcracker story is . . ."
- "The saddest part of the Nutcracker story is . . ."
- "The happiest part of the Nutcracker story is . . ."

To help your students better understand what they will see onstage, here is a brief summary of the action on stage during the ballet. Your students will see excerpts from both Act I & Act II.

## **The Nutcracker Ballet**

### **Act I**

It's a cozy Christmas Eve and Herr Drosselmeyer, the famous clock maker, is putting the finishing touches on the toys he will bring to the Stahlbaum's annual Christmas party. As the beloved Godfather of Clara and Fritz Stahlbaum, Drosselmeyer adores delighting the children with his elaborate creations. Each year his gifts are so magnificent that some whisper they appear almost *magical!*

Meanwhile, Clara, Fritz and the entire Stahlbaum household are busy preparing for their guests to arrive. When the guests finally appear, the party picks up with dancing and celebration. Drosselmeyer makes a dramatic entrance and the children gather around him excitedly to receive their gifts. Drosselmeyer entertains the guests with a play acted out by Mechanical Dolls. The children are delighted to hear the story of an evil Mouse Queen who was so jealous of the love between a beautiful Ballerina Doll and her valiant Soldier Doll that she cast a spell upon the Soldier turning him into a wooden Nutcracker! Clara becomes so enchanted with the wooden Nutcracker from the play Drosselmeyer decides to give him to her as a gift. It isn't long before Fritz grows jealous, snatches the Nutcracker from Clara and accidentally breaks him. Clara is upset, but Drosselmeyer fixes the Nutcracker with a wave of his magic wand and he is as good as new.

The party grows late and the children become sleepy. Everyone generously thanks the Stahlbaum's before they leave. As Clara's family retires to bed, she checks on her Nutcracker one last time and ends up falling asleep near the Christmas tree with the Nutcracker in her arms.

At the stroke of midnight Clara wakes up to a frightening scene. Out of nowhere large mice, led by the jealous Mouse Queen, begin to circle the room. Godfather Drosselmeyer appears and chases the mice away but something seems strange. Is she dreaming? The house and the Christmas tree appear to be growing larger- and look! Her beloved Nutcracker has come to life just in time to save her from the Mouse King and his horrible rodent army. As toy soldiers battle mice, the Mouse King begins to overpower the Nutcracker. Clara makes a desperate move to save her Nutcracker from defeat and throws her candle at the Mouse King. She hits him directly in the head! The Nutcracker is able to overcome the surprised Mouse King and claims victory. The mice army quickly carries away their King.

Clara is stunned to see the Nutcracker transformed into a human prince. Restored to his true self, the Prince dances with Clara and they find themselves in the Land of Snow. The Snow Queen graciously lends them her sleigh so they can be transported to the Prince's Kingdom of the Sweets.



## Act II

After their magical journey through the Land of Snow, Guardian Angels guide Clara and the Prince safely to their destination of the Kingdom of Sweets. Clara can't believe her eyes; ice cream mountains topped with whipped cream whiter than snow, sweetly glazed flowers and butter-cream frosting everywhere she looks! Upon their arrival, they are greeted by the Sugar Plum Fairy who is so grateful to Clara for rescuing her handsome Prince that she decides to throw a party in her honor. People from all over the Kingdom perform their native dances in tribute to Clara's bravery and she is presented with every imaginable sweet.

There is Chocolate from Spain, Coffee from Arabia, Chinese Tea, Russian Candy Canes, French Marzipan, Gingerbread Cookies from Germany and a beautiful English garden full of Candied Flowers! Finally, Clara's beloved Nutcracker Prince escorts the Sugar Plum Fairy to the center of the room. The captivating pair dance lighter than air and this beautiful dance completes Clara's most perfect evening.

The festival concludes when Drosselmeyer appears in the Kingdom of Sweets to whisk Clara away in the magic sleigh. Clara is happy to see her Godfather but is also a bit perplexed. She begins to wonder if this too were nothing but a dream. All of a sudden she feels very sleepy and is happy to curl up in the sleigh- which feels just like her favorite couch at home. As the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Sweets bid Clara farewell and goodnight, they are not sad. For they know they will see her again whenever Clara dreams of her wonderful Nutcracker Prince.



## After Viewing Excerpts from the Nutcracker Ballet

Students can reflect on their experience of the ballet, using a series of discussion, drawing and/or writing prompts.

### Discussion/Writing prompts:

- What did you see at the Nutcracker?
- What did you hear at the Nutcracker?
- How did the ballet make you feel?
- What did their costumes tell you about the characters? What did their dances tell you about them?
- How did the sound of the music help you understand what was happening on stage?
- What was your favorite part/character of the ballet?
- Was there any part of the ballet that you did not like? Why?

Students can critique the performance of The Nutcracker.

### Describe

- What was the name of the ballet?
- What did you see during the performance?
- What did you hear?
- Recount the story of the ballet.

### Analyze

- How was the story told?
- How did the dancing help you understand the action?
- Was there any use of pantomime? Did it help you understand the action?
- Who were the main characters?
- Did their costumes or dancing help you understand who they were?
- What did the characters do? How did they relate to one another?
- How did dance and/or pantomime help you understand this?

### Interpret

- How did The Nutcracker make you feel?
- Did it remind you of other experiences (at the theater or movies)?

### Judge

- How would you judge the Nutcracker-was it a successful or unsuccessful performance? (Was it good or bad?) Explain.
- Compare it to other successful/unsuccessful (good/bad) performances/movies. Explain what worked/didn't work.
- Which is the more satisfying story: the book or the ballet? Explain.
- Would you recommend the ballet performance to a friend or relative? Why or why not? (Should this person read the book first? Why or why not?)

**Use in the music curriculum  
(audio cd of Tchaikovsky)**

**Music Appreciation:** Play some of the music from The Nutcracker. There is a splendid banquet featuring many of Tchaikovsky's most familiar melodies: Tea, Coffee, Chocolate, Trepak (Russian), and the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy. Note how each song at the feast is connected to a different country and how the various styles, rhythms, and instruments help to set the mood. Ask students to look for the different styles of movement and costumes when they attend the performance.

**Listen and Participate:**

Using a CD, play a portion of The Waltz of the Flowers from Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite. Have the children close their eyes and listen carefully to the music. Then ask them to move their hands in time to the music.

**Dance and Pretend:**

Play portions of the music again and have the children move around the room pretending that they are flowers. Show them a basic waltz step as they move in time to the music. Encourage them to twirl and hold their arms out like ballet dancers.



## The Nutcracker Composer



**Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky** was born in 1840 in present-day Udmurtia, Russia. His father was a Ukrainian mining engineer. Peter began piano lessons at the age of five, and within three years he could read music as well as his teacher.

In 1850, Peter's father was appointed as the Director of the St. Petersburg Technological Institute. It was there that Peter received his education at the School of Jurisprudence. The only music instruction he received were piano lessons from a piano manufacturer who occasionally made visits to the school. He also attended the opera and theater with his classmates. It was the works of Rossini, Bellini, Verdi and Mozart that he enjoyed the most.

Peter's mother died in 1854, which brought him much sorrow. He responded by turning to music. It was at this time that he made his first serious efforts as a composer, writing a waltz in her memory. In 1855, Peter's father asked a well-known German piano teacher to encourage his son's interest in music. However, when Peter's father asked about his son's musical potential, his teacher wrote that nothing indicated he would be a fine composer or performer. His father asked Peter to complete his course of study and then pursue a post in the Ministry of Justice. He did as he was asked, though his interest in music never left him.

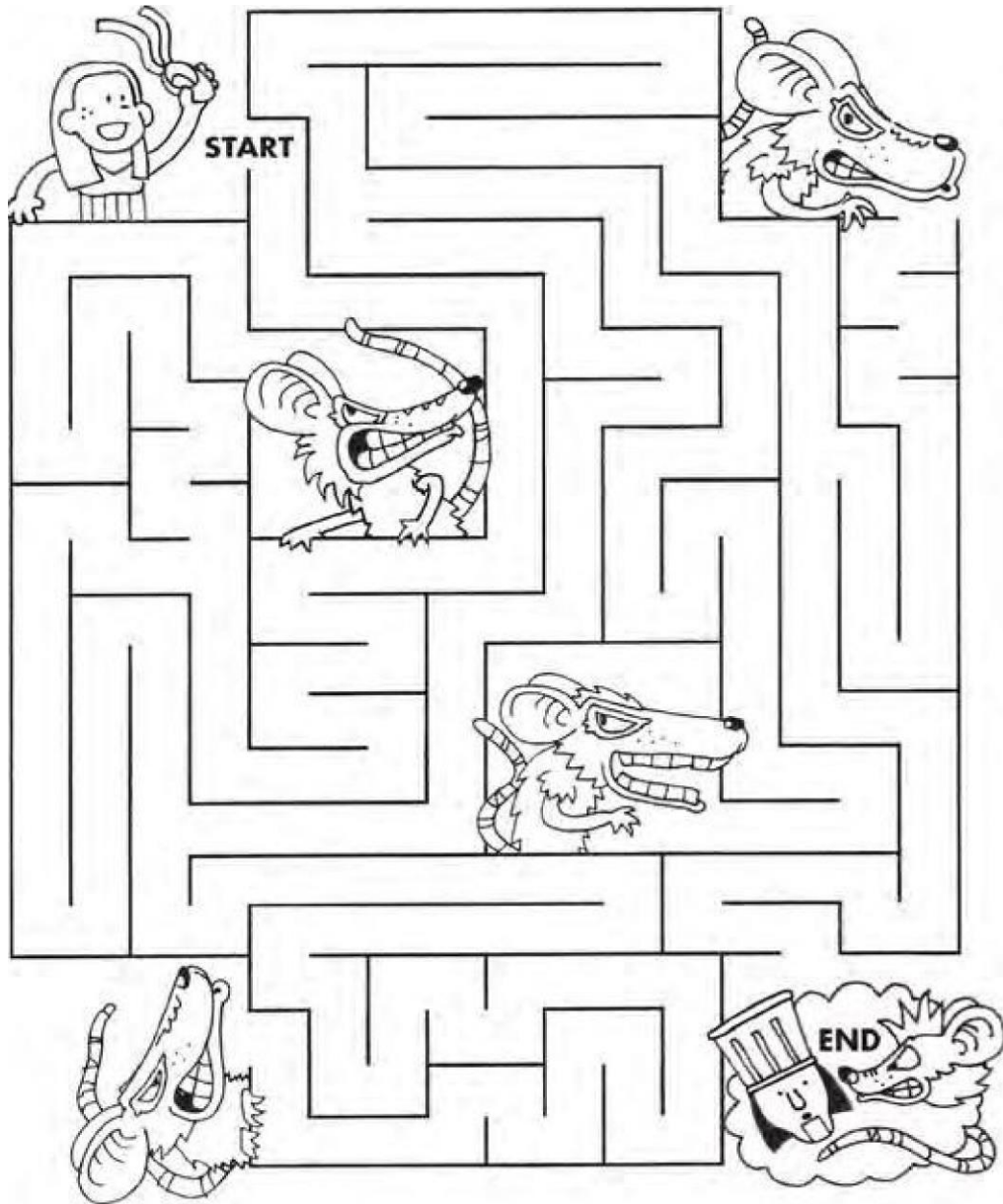
In 1861, Tchaikovsky heard about classes being offered by the Russian Musical Society. He promptly began his studies. In the following year, Tchaikovsky followed his teacher to the St. Petersburg Conservatory where he accepted a post. It was at the conservatory that he met and studied with Anton Rubinstein, director and founder of the Conservatory. Rubinstein was impressed with Tchaikovsky's talent.

In 1869 Tchaikovsky composed his first recognized masterpiece, the Overture-Fantasy *Romeo and Juliet*. Tchaikovsky was deeply inspired by Shakespeare's writing, and in later years composed other works for *The Tempest* and *Hamlet*.

On November 6, 1893 Tchaikovsky died in St. Petersburg from cholera. His compositions are some of the greatest works of the Romantic Era, including the *1812 Overture*, *March Slav*, and *The Nutcracker*, which has become a Christmas season favorite.

# THE NUTCRACKER MAZE

The Nutcracker doll is locked in combat with the fearsome Mouse King. Help Clara find her way across the floor to help her friend, avoiding all the other mice as you go!



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_



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## Nutcracker Ballet

B I Z U L O Q V E M T P F O Q S I C D B  
B Y P Z O Y C W M R A A R B Q B E K O N  
A L M J D C O Q C R R J I P H Q B G L P  
C J L N N Z C N T D A O T A C P E S L Y  
L G F O C G P Y S R L K Z K R W U O S C  
Z S N V N M Y L J O C N X C J V Y L U R  
X Z L Q G N E U S S U X C O D Y R D S E  
H J D H S G W A K S N O W K O L I I E K  
Q P X C N Z M I Q E K U O N N R A E P C  
O Z C A G R W Z M L H O B O D U F R B A  
P C N T L H G A B M R D W W B R M S R R  
N K F Q V V R N H E C H H Y W A U D E C  
I Y E J V A C Q T Y N P P S A U L R V T  
W B D Z B H J K O E Y H R W I F P L J U  
X B P I I L O Z R R X F J A U N R T E N  
C C A N Q M U B Z V U U Q J O D A W N T  
I N E E U Q E S U O M Q D X I K G P H D  
D S N A I S S U R D M T F A L J U Y S H  
E N Z L F B P H T C H A I K O V S K Y P  
X W W P D H V D K F W X Y H T N R U K U

ANGELS  
ARABIAN  
BALLET  
CHINESE  
CLARA  
DOLLS  
DROSSELMEYER  
FRITZ  
MOUSEQUEEN  
NUTCRACKER  
PARTY  
RUSSIAN  
SNOW  
SOLDIERS  
SPANISH  
SUGARPLUMFAIRY  
TCHAIKOVSKY



