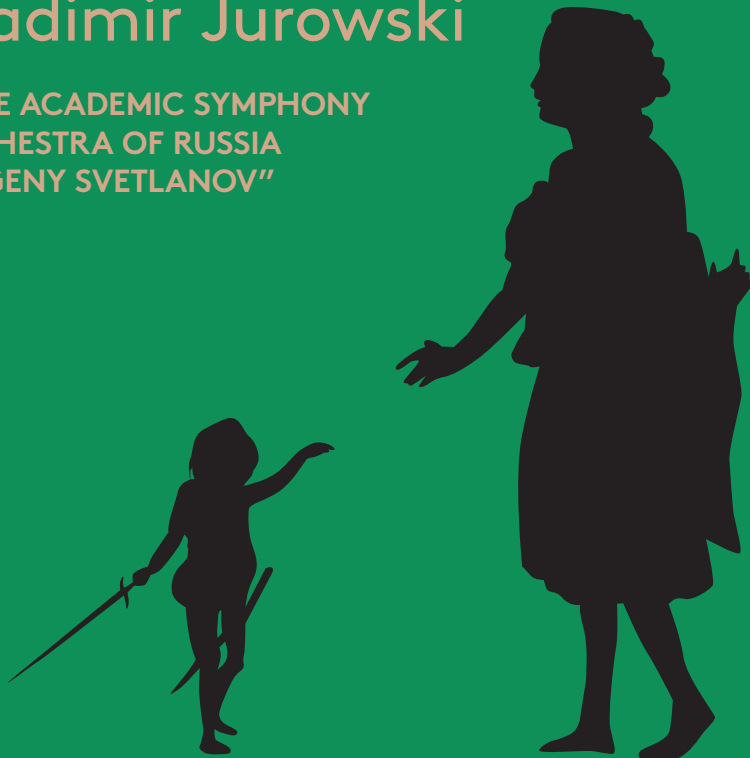
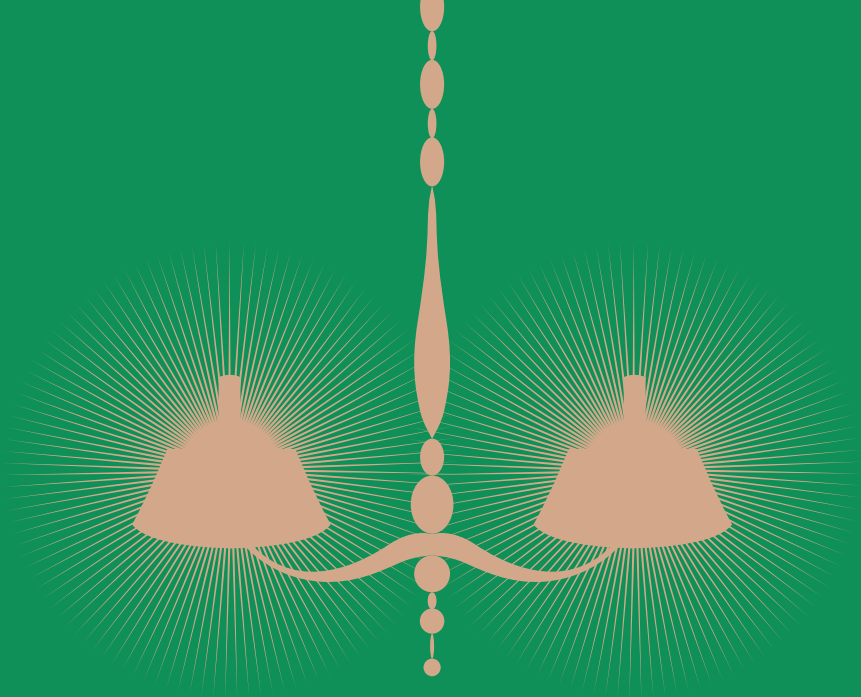


Tchaikovsky The Nutcracker Vladimir Jurowski

STATE ACADEMIC SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA OF RUSSIA
"EVGENY SVETLANOV"





Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

The Nutcracker (1892)

1. Overture 3. 13

Act I

Tableau 1

2. I. The Decoration of the Christmas Tree 3. 52

3. II. March 2. 27

4. III. Children's Gallop and Dance of the Parents 2. 27

5. IV. Drosselmeyer's Arrival 6. 08

6. V. Scene and Grandfather Waltz 6. 32

7. VI. Departure of the Guests. Night – The Magic Spell Begins 6. 57

8. VII. The Battle 3. 37

Tableau 2

9. VIII. In the Pine Forest 3. 37

10. IX. Waltz of the Snowflakes 6. 45

Act II

Tableau 3

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12. XI. Clara and the Prince 4. 51

13. XIIIa. Divertimento: Chocolate – Spanish Dance 1. 12

14. XIIIb. Divertimento: Coffee – Arabian Dance 3. 00

15. XIIIc. Divertimento: Tea – Chinese Dance 1. 06

16. XIId. Divertimento: Trepak – Russian Dance 1. 08

17. XIIIe. Divertimento: Dance of the Reed Pipes 2. 20

18. XIIIf. Divertimento: Mother Gigogne and the Clowns 2. 40

19. XIII. Waltz of the Flowers 6. 21

20. XIVa. Pas de deux: Dance of the Prince and the Sugar-Plum Fairy 4. 36

21. XIVb. Variation I: Tarantella 0. 43

22. XIVc. Variation II: Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy 2. 08

23. XIV. Coda; XV. Final Waltz and Apotheosis 6. 27

Total playing time: 86. 25

Sveshnikov Boys Choir of the Moscow Choral School

Alexey Petrov, Artistic Director

Nina Kupriyanova, solo harp

Vera Almazova, solo celesta

State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia "Evgeny Svetlanov"

conducted by **Vladimir Jurowski**

Evoking a sense of wonder

In a famous letter written in the summer of 1880, Tchaikovsky used the French notion of *le joli* (the pretty, or the nice), to explain to his patron Nadezhda von Meck why he considered Bizet's *Carmen* 'an absolute *chef d'oeuvre*'. It was the defining feature of his age, he argued, that composers were pursuing characteristic sounds in their works, but 'the cult of various spicy harmonisations, original orchestral combinations and all kinds of external effects' would often become a cause in and of itself; and due to this rational approach, many works tended to remain cold and devoid of feeling. 'And here appears this Frenchman', Tchaikovsky wrote, 'whose piquancy and spiciness is not purposely fabricated, but flows in a free stream, flattering the ear, and is touching and moving at the same time. It is as if he is saying: "You don't want anything grand, strong or grandiose; you want something pretty, and here you have a pretty opera."

And really, I don't know anything in music that could better represent the element I would call the pretty, *le joli*. It is charming and delightful from beginning to end.'

This aesthetic, which Tchaikovsky associated primarily with the French, is essential for understanding ballets such as *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*. It set him apart from many contemporary symphonic composers: while undeniably able to portray strong emotions and powerful drama, he would never find it below him to compose something 'pretty', taking pride in pleasing his audience with — quite simply — works of beauty. Thanks to this seemingly old-fashioned ideal, his ballet music became the aural counterpart to the glamour and glitter of imperial St Petersburg, and inspired the younger artists in the circle of Sergey Diaghilev, who were looking for alternatives to the habits of Romanticism and Realism.

It would be hard to imagine a composer better suited to compose a ballet about the magical candyland of Confiturembourg. Happy to delight the senses and taking recourse to culinary metaphor from time to time, Tchaikovsky is even known to appreciate — as something of a counterpart to *le joli* — the notion of the 'tasty' (*vkusnoye*) in music. Still, after accepting the commission for the two-act *Nutcracker* along with a one-act opera, *Iolanta*, for a double-bill premiere, Tchaikovsky obviously struggled with the ballet, even to the point that the director of the Imperial Theatres, Ivan Vzhevolozhsky, apologized to the composer for forcing the subject upon him.

Critics have pointed out various shortcomings in the ballet's scenario, which was created by the venerable ballet master Marius Petipa shortly before he had to cede the project to his assistant Lev Ivanov due to his failing health. The most substantial of these issues, which

may also have bothered Tchaikovsky, was the unbalanced distribution of scenes and formal dances. The first act is dominated by action: it shows how young Clara is given a nutcracker doll by the mysterious councillor Drosselmayer on Christmas Eve, how the doll and other toys come to life at midnight to battle an army of mice, and how Clara saves her beloved Nutcracker by throwing her slipper at the Mouse King; in the second act, by contrast, the Nutcracker introduces her to Confiturembourg, a land of sweets ruled by the Sugar Plum Fairy, where they are treated to an extensive divertissement, a string of formal dances with little or no story left to tell. The plot as such makes little sense, and lacks essential features of the story by E.T.A. Hoffmann from which it was derived, which is characteristically grotesque and ironic, playing with the confusion between reality and fantasy. And since the first act was largely performed by children, the balletomanes had to wait until late in the second act before the *prima ballerina* (the Sugar Plum Fairy — hardly

a main character in the plot) could finally demonstrate her skill.

Still, the ballet would eventually become the staple of companies around the world and surely we have Tchaikovsky's score to thank for it. Unlike the ballet, which would only become a genuine success in the mid-twentieth century with new choreographies applied to it, the *Nutcracker Suite*, a selection of pieces drawn from the score by the composer and performed several months in advance of the 1892 premiere, was an instant hit. The ballet's simplified plot has now largely supplanted Hoffmann's version in the popular imagination, and later adaptations of the story typically call their heroine Clara, rather than Marie, as she is called in the German original.

Both the sheer familiarity of the suite and the fact that the ballet is now often performed as a Christmas matinee for children, may well stand in the way of a full appreciation of Tchaikovsky's

achievement. Listening to the work in its entirety rather than the familiar hits alone can be a refreshing experience. It will situate the famous moments in context, revealing for instance the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy as part of a *pas de deux* with her partner Prince Coqueluche, and in many respects offers a complement to the more static numbers of the suite. The music of the first act, in particular, is decidedly more 'symphonic' in the sense that its high density of action allows for continuous development, including a majestic crescendo as the Christmas tree expands over Clara's head until she is of the same size as the mice, and of course the concluding battle scene, which is highly evocative but characterized by a supreme lightness of touch.

As Roland John Wiley has shown in his extensive study of the ballets, Tchaikovsky sought to turn the disjointed scenario into a unified composition by employing an elaborate tonal scheme, as he had

previously done in *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*. He contrasted B-flat major, the key of the overture, with the distant key of E major, associated with the fantasy world of Confiturembourg, and has Drosselmayer interrupt the orderly progression of keys in the first numbers in order to intimate fantastic events to come. The musical layout is roughly symmetrical: while the story, in its original form, was decidedly open-ended, Tchaikovsky sought to give his score a satisfying conclusion by returning to the home key of B-flat in the concluding Apotheosis, while a recollection of the melody that opens Act II maintains the connection to the realm of Confiturembourg. It offers an appropriate musical basis for later stagings in which we are offered a final view of Clara, waking up at home, wondering whether it was all just a dream.

This overall plan is filled out with a wealth of melodic, rhythmic and harmonic detail, but above all, a wonderful diversity

in instrumentation. Tchaikovsky made several remarkable additions to the orchestra: rattles played by the children as the grown-ups dance the so-called Grossvater-Tanz; a wordless backstage chorus in the Waltz of the Snowflakes, which may have been prompted by the fact that the opera participated in the double-bill premiere; and, of course, the celesta, a new invention Tchaikovsky had encountered in Paris, and had imported to Russia in the greatest secrecy so that none of his Russian competitors would catch wind of it – his unique sound for the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy would be the instrument's defining application. To portray the cascading rivers of rose oil in Confiturembourg, Tchaikovsky introduced the new technique of *frulato*, a manner of playing the flute with a rolling 'r', which he had just learned from his former student Alexander Khimchenko. He also experimented with traditional instruments in unusual combinations, such as violas and trombones to introduces Drosselmayer's

quirky theme, a flute and bassoons in the Chinese Dance, and a trio of flutes with low pizzicato strings in the Dance of the Mirlitons. Through this rich world of sounds he was able to evoke, successively, the playfulness of childhood, the uncanny, and a sense of wonder. *The Nutcracker*, in short, does not fall short of the composer's own judgement of *Carmen*: it is 'charming and delightful from beginning to end'. All we need to do to appreciate it in full, is to embrace its charms, and open ourselves to *le joli*.

Rutger Helmers



Vladimir Jurowski
© Drew Kelly



Vladimir Jurowski & State Academic Symphony
Orchestra of Russia "Evgeny Svetlanov"
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Synopsis

Act I

Tableau 1
Christmas Eve at the Von Stahlbaum home. Excitement runs high as last-minute preparations are made. Grandparents and guests arrive to celebrate the holiday with Clara, Fritz and their parents. Arriving late in the midst of the celebration is Herr Drosselmeyer, Clara's mysterious godfather. He entertains everyone with magic tricks and mechanical dolls. Clara begs to have one of the dolls for her very own, but Drosselmeyer denies her request. Instead, he presents her with a wooden nutcracker soldier. Fritz feels slighted, grabs the nutcracker from Clara and in the struggle, the nutcracker is broken. Clara is devastated, but Drosselmeyer mends the nutcracker and the celebration continues. As the children grow weary, the guests depart, and Drosselmeyer disappears as mysteriously as he had arrived. Clara

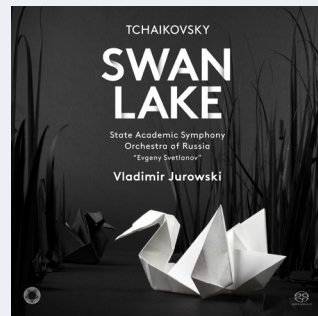
carefully places her beloved nutcracker under the Christmas tree before the family retires to bed.

Tableau 2
The house grows dark, and Clara steals back into the room to look at her precious nutcracker. As she falls back asleep on the couch, she is filled with happy memories of the Christmas Eve party and the dancing dolls. All too soon her thoughts are interrupted by her menacing brother Fritz. He calls mice from everywhere and leads them in a chase after Clara. Before her eyes, Fritz is transformed into the Mouse King. Clara calls Drosselmeyer, who summons the toy soldiers, but the Mouse King and his army are too strong for them. Drosselmeyer transforms the wooden nutcracker doll into a lifelike soldier. The nutcracker then leads the soldiers into battle. The mice appear to be winning. Clara, determined to help her nutcracker, strikes the Mouse King with her shoe. The mice are defeated, and the battle is won!

Act II

Tableau 3
Together, Clara, the Nutcracker and Drosselmeyer travel on a sleigh, driven by the Christmas tree angel, to far-away lands. They travel through the Land of Snow and finally to the Kingdom of Sweets where they meet the Sugar Plum Fairy, who welcomes them to her kingdom and introduces her friends. A celebration is called to honour the defeat of the Mouse King. The Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier dance for Clara. Everything is so beautiful, and Clara's heart is filled with happiness. As the festivities draw to a close, Clara reluctantly waves goodbye to the Kingdom of Sweets and to all her new friends. Drosselmeyer leads her safely home.

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Executive producer **Renaud Loranger**

A&R Manager **Kate Rockett**

Recording producer, Balance engineer & Editor **Erdo Groot** (Polyhymnia International B.V.)

Recording engineer **Lauran Jurrius** (Polyhymnia International B.V.)

Assistant recording engineers **Igor Solovyov & Anton Bushinskiy** (Tchaikovsky Conservatory)

Liner notes **Rutger Helmers**

Design **Zigmunds Lapsa**

Product Management **Kasper van Kooten**

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