

NUTCRACKER SPECTACULAR



STUDENT MATINEE PACKET

ABOUT BALLET ARKANSAS



Ballet Arkansas traces its origins to the Little Rock Civic Ballet, founded in 1966 by Lorraine and Donald C. Cranford. Incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 1978, the organization has, over the course of its 47-year history, touched the lives of more than half a million Arkansans through its performances, education programs, and community engagement initiatives. Today, Ballet Arkansas stands as the only professional ballet company in Little Rock and is widely recognized as the state’s premier ballet organization—serving audiences across every region of the Natural State.

Under the visionary leadership of Michael and Catherine Fothergill, Ballet Arkansas has grown into one of the 75 largest ballet companies in the United States, according to the Dance Data Project. The company of 17 world-class dancers presents an annual season of vibrant programming that spans classical masterpieces, landmark works of American dance, and world premieres by some of the field’s most innovative choreographers. With a performance and broadcast reach extending to all 50 states and over 60 countries worldwide, Ballet Arkansas engages nearly 50,000 audience members each year and serves as a powerful cultural ambassador for the state of Arkansas.

Ballet Arkansas is proud to serve as the official dance presenter of the Robinson Center, Little Rock’s most prestigious performing arts venue, and to hold the distinguished designation of Arts Partner Company in Residence at the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts. These partnerships amplify the company’s capacity to deliver high-caliber, multidisciplinary programming to diverse audiences while deepening its integration within the state’s broader cultural ecosystem.

A recognized statewide leader in dance education, Ballet Arkansas is home to a thriving School for Dance that provides exceptional instruction to hundreds of students from diverse backgrounds. Led by a distinguished faculty, the School is complemented by the organization’s robust educational outreach initiatives, which engage more than 10,000 K–12 students annually. In addition, over 300 young dancers participate each year in Ballet Arkansas’s celebrated Community Cast productions, cultivating meaningful access to the performing arts and nurturing the next generation of artists and arts patrons across Arkansas.

THE LIFE OF A PROFESSIONAL BALLET DANCER



Ballet Arkansas's company of 17 professional dancers are full-time, salaried employees who receive employment benefits and work a standard Monday–Friday schedule. Many are graduates of the nation's most prestigious university dance programs, while others have trained at some of America's finest ballet institutions.

Each day begins with a 90-minute ballet class to condition and prepare their bodies for the physical demands ahead. The remainder of the workday is dedicated to rehearsals, where—on average—it takes 25 hours of practice to learn just one hour of performance material. Once choreography is “staged,” dancers devote the rest of the rehearsal period to refining every detail for the audience's enjoyment. While they are artists, they are also professional athletes, balancing artistry with peak physical performance.

In addition to mastering thousands of intricate dance steps and precise musical phrasing, company members must memorize hundreds of light cues, navigate shifting formations, and bring each character to life with theatrical nuance. Producing any Ballet Arkansas production requires hundreds of hours of meticulous rehearsal.

In fact, a 2020 ranking by InsuranceProviders.com and the U.S. Department of Labor identified dance as the most physically demanding job in the United States. The intensity of the profession often leads dancers to retire from performing in their mid-thirties, transitioning to other roles within the arts.



AUTHOR

Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann (born Ernst Theodor Wilhelm Hoffmann; 24 January 1776 – 25 June 1822) was a German Romantic author of fantasy and Gothic horror, a jurist, composer, music critic and artist. His stories form the basis of Jacques Offenbach's opera *The Tales of Hoffmann*, in which Hoffmann appears (heavily fictionalized) as the hero. He is also the author of the novella *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, on which Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Nutcracker* is based. The ballet *Coppélia* is based on two other stories that Hoffmann wrote, while Schumann's *Kreisleriana* is based on Hoffmann's character Johannes Kreisler. Ballet Arkansas's production of *The Nutcracker Spectacular* is adapted from Hoffmann's *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*.



COMPOSER

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) studied at the Conservatory in St. Petersburg, Russia. Tchaikovsky is one of the most popular and influential of all romantic composers. His work is expressive, melodic, and grand in scale, with rich orchestrations. His output was prodigious and included chamber works, symphonies, concerti for various instruments, operas, and works for piano. His creations for ballet include *Swan Lake*, *The Nutcracker*, and *The Sleeping Beauty*



THE STORY

ACT 1 - THE PARTY

Anticipation fills the air as guests gather for the Stahlbaum family's annual holiday celebration. Mr. and Mrs. Stahlbaum, along with their children, Clara and Fritz, warmly welcome friends and relatives from distant places. Laughter, music, and dancing fill the room, and the merriment grows when Clara's mysterious godfather, Herr Drosselmeyer, makes his grand entrance. With him, he brings three enchanting life-sized dolls that captivate the crowd with their magical movements. After their dance, Herr Drosselmeyer presents Clara with a beautifully hand-carved Nutcracker, instantly admired by all the children. Overcome with envy, Fritz snatches the doll from Clara and breaks it before the astonished guests. Heartbroken, Clara is comforted as Herr Drosselmeyer gently repairs the Nutcracker, binding it with a handkerchief. As the evening winds down, the guests share a final dance before bidding farewell, and the Stahlbaum home falls into a quiet slumber on Christmas Eve.



ACT I - BATTLE SCENE & LAND OF THE SNOW

Just before midnight, Herr Drosselmeyer returns to mend Clara's broken Nutcracker. As the clock strikes twelve, he casts a spell over the house, and strange, wondrous things begin to unfold. The Christmas tree soars to towering heights, and the room fills with enormous, menacing mice that terrify Clara. To her astonishment, the Nutcracker appears transformed into a life-sized figure, leading an army of wooden soldiers into battle. The clash intensifies until the fearsome Mouse King emerges, swiftly overpowering the Nutcracker. In a moment of courage, Clara hurls her slipper at the villain, distracting him long enough for the Nutcracker to strike the final blow. Victorious, Herr Drosselmeyer reappears and whisks Clara and the Nutcracker away on a magical journey through the shimmering Land of Snow.



ACT II - THE LAND OF THE SWEETS

After their journey through a glittering winter wonderland, Clara and the Nutcracker arrive in the radiant Kingdom of the Sweets, where they are warmly welcomed by the Sugar Plum Fairy and her gallant Cavalier. Hearing of Clara's courage, the Nutcracker recounts her heroic deeds, and the Sugar Plum Fairy rewards her bravery with a dazzling celebration of dances from around the world. As the magic of the night fades, Clara awakens on Christmas morning to find herself back in the Stahlbaum home, her beloved Nutcracker doll by her side. Was it all a dream? Only the mysterious Herr Drosselmeyer knows the truth.



CAST OF CHARACTERS

In addition to Ballet Arkansas's acclaimed company of 17 professional dancers, The Nutcracker Spectacular showcases over 250 community performers from across the state. Following a highly anticipated audition process, local dancers are cast in roles such as Party Parents, Clara, Fritz, Mice, Soldiers, Snowflakes, and a variety of supporting characters in Act II. As the largest production of its kind in Arkansas, it is the only performance where community members and professional artists share the stage in a dazzling holiday tradition.



HERR DROSSELMAYER

Herr Drosselmeyer, Clara's enigmatic and enchanting godfather, is a master toymaker and magician. Arriving at the Stahlbaum's Christmas party, he delights guests with three life-sized dancing dolls.



THE NUTCRACKER PRINCE

Herr Drosselmeyer gifts Clara his most treasured creation—a magical doll that springs to life on Christmas Eve. It is this enchanted figure who bravely battles the Rat King and then escorts Clara on a wondrous journey to the Land of the Sweets, where she encounters the radiant Sugar Plum Fairy.



THE RAT KING

Sinister and cunning, the Rat King leads his army of mice into battle against the Nutcracker Prince. In the midst of the fierce clash, Clara bravely intervenes, hurling her slipper to distract him—allowing the Nutcracker Prince to strike the final blow and claim victory.



CLARA

Clara, sister to Fritz Stahlbaum and the heroine of our tale, receives a magical Nutcracker doll from her godfather, Herr Drosselmeyer. With courage and quick thinking, she helps defeat the Rat King before journeying through the shimmering Land of Snow to the enchanting Land of the Sweets. Her wondrous dream has inspired countless versions of The Nutcracker performed on stages around the world.

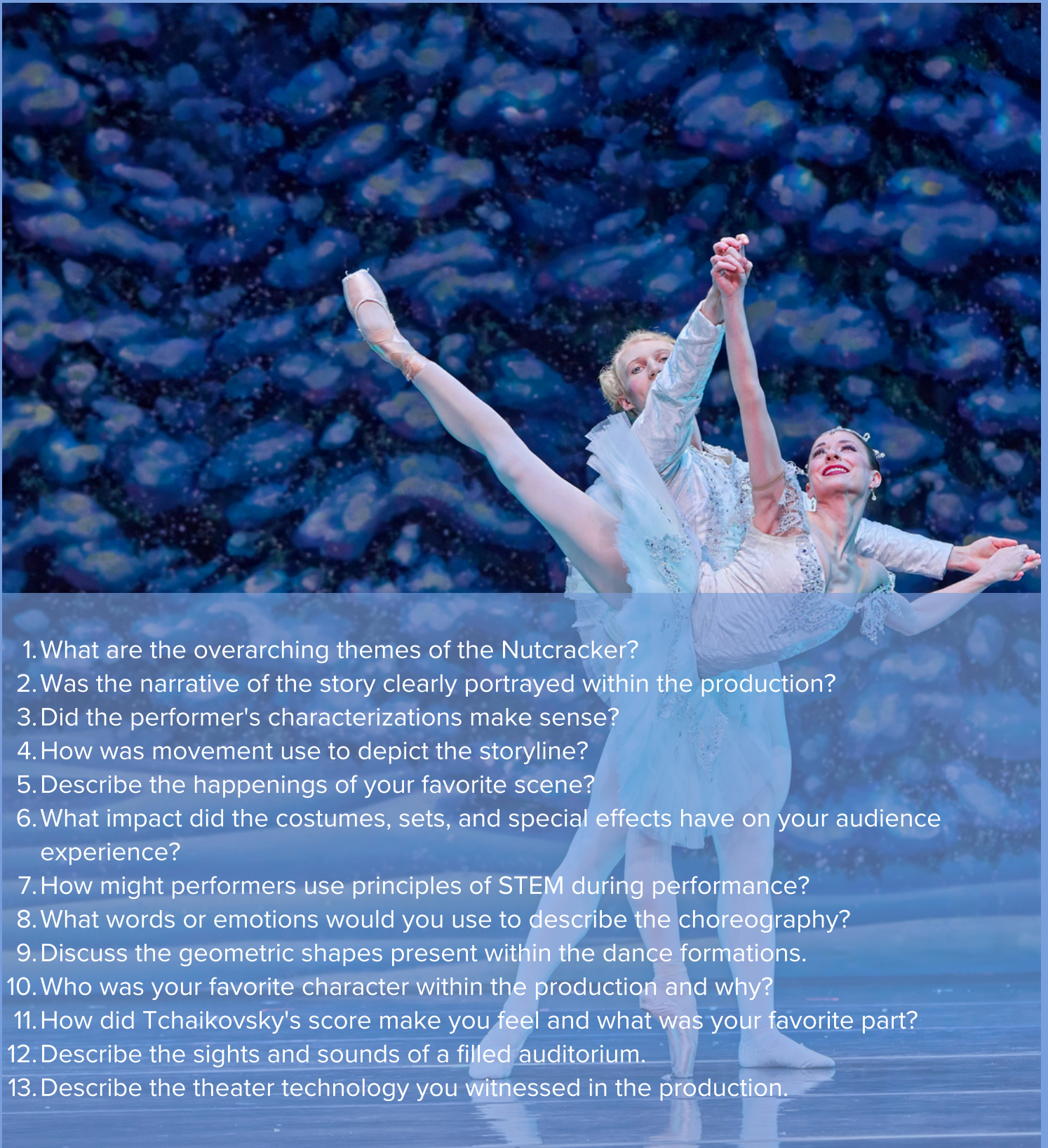


SUGAR PLUM FAIRY & CAVALIER

The Sugar Plum Fairy and her gallant Cavalier reign over the magical Land of the Sweets, safeguarding its wonders from the perils of the human world. Loyal allies of the Nutcracker and the Snow Queen, they serve as gracious hosts, welcoming Clara and the Young Prince with generosity, splendor, and joy.

QUESTIONS

TO ASK YOURSELF



1. What are the overarching themes of the Nutcracker?
2. Was the narrative of the story clearly portrayed within the production?
3. Did the performer's characterizations make sense?
4. How was movement used to depict the storyline?
5. Describe the happenings of your favorite scene?
6. What impact did the costumes, sets, and special effects have on your audience experience?
7. How might performers use principles of STEM during performance?
8. What words or emotions would you use to describe the choreography?
9. Discuss the geometric shapes present within the dance formations.
10. Who was your favorite character within the production and why?
11. How did Tchaikovsky's score make you feel and what was your favorite part?
12. Describe the sights and sounds of a filled auditorium.
13. Describe the theater technology you witnessed in the production.

ETIQUETTE 101

RULES FOR THE THEATER



Attending a ballet performance is much like going to the movies—only the magic is live. The lights will dim before the performance begins, and the theater will remain dark until the end, except during intermission. Audience members are expected to sit quietly while the dancers perform, with applause warmly welcomed at the conclusion of each scene. However, loud expressions such as shouting, whistling, or screaming are discouraged, as they can distract both performers and fellow audience members.

Guests are encouraged to dress comfortably, keeping in mind that food, beverages, and chewing gum are not permitted inside the auditorium. Restroom visits are allowed as needed, but should be done quietly and with minimal disruption. Because all performance material is protected by copyright, photography and video recording are strictly prohibited.

Rules of the Theater

- Avoid Distractions – Silence or turn off your phone and give the performers your full attention.
- Open Your Mind – Immerse yourself in the sights and sounds of the performance, and enjoy forming your own interpretations.
- Be a Courteous Participant – Follow audience guidelines at all times to ensure an enjoyable experience for everyone.
- Enjoy the Show!



SHARE THE MAGIC OF THE NUTCRACKER WITH YOUR STUDENTS!

Thursday, December 10 & Friday, December 11, 2026 • 10:30 a.m.
Robinson Center, Little Rock

A tradition for many Arkansas families and one of the State's largest tourism attractions, "The Nutcracker Spectacular" is Arkansas's largest and longest-running holiday production, supported by the Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau. As one of America's Top 75 Ballet Companies, Ballet Arkansas brings this beloved holiday tradition to life with stunning choreography, enchanting music, and dazzling costumes and sets.

Tickets: \$8 Student & \$10 Educator