

BIA

BALLET IDAHO ACADEMY

THE NUTCRACKER STUDY



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WELCOME

Ballet Idaho is thrilled to bring the magic of *The Nutcracker* to students through-out the Treasure Valley. This Study Guide provides valuable information about this seasonal ballet treasure to prepare students for their up-coming theatre experience so that it is more meaningful and engaging for them. This guide also provides material for further discussion afterwards. We hope you enjoy Ballet Idaho's performance at the Morrison Center!

Sincerely,

Jenny Weaver
Executive Director

Peter Anastos
Artistic Director

Emily Wallace
Academy Director

ABOUT ARTISTIC DIRECTOR PETER ANASTOS

Peter Anastos has choreographed more than 100 stage works for the finest national and regional ballet companies in the United States as well as for modern dance companies, theater, film, and television. He has also choreographed in Europe, Asia, and Latin America and his ballets are performed worldwide. Mr. Anastos enjoys a longstanding collaboration with Mikhail Baryshnikov and their projects together include American Ballet Theater's *Cinderella*, CBS Television's *Baryshnikov in Hollywood* (Emmy Award nomination) and the photography book, *The Swan Prince* for Bantam Books.

Mr. Anastos has the rare honor of receiving two Guggenheim Foundation Fellowships in Choreography and four Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts.

For the Broadway stage he choreographed *I Hate Hamlet* and *Where She Danced*, based on the life of Isadora Duncan. Other major theatre credits include *33 Variations* (Arena Stage, Washington, D.C.) and *Chess* (National Company). He has choreographed several television specials and two Hollywood films, *Addams Family* and *Addams Family Values*, both for Paramount Pictures. He was choreographer-in-residence for the Santa Fe Opera and Sundance Theatre Festival, part of Robert Redford's Sundance Institute in Utah.

ABOUT BALLET IDAHO

Ballet Idaho offers a full season of performances at the Morrison Center, a professional Academy of Dance, and extensive educational outreach programs for students in Boise, the Treasure Valley, and throughout Idaho.

Our mission at Ballet Idaho is to promote classical and contemporary ballet by encouraging artists to greatness and inspiring the public to value the performing arts. Our vision is to provide beautiful, expressive ballet that is inspirational to all communities in Idaho. We are committed to strengthening our community by providing accessible and diverse arts programming for schools and children throughout Boise and the extended Treasure Valley.





HOW TO BE AN ATTENTIVE AUDIENCE MEMBER

- Focus your attention on the artists and show respect by quietly watching and listening.
- Applaud when you enjoy something or follow the lead from others in the audience. Clapping at an impressive movement and at the end of a piece is a way to say “thank you” to the artists.
- Be courteous to the performers and other audience members. During our Question and Answer period, the best way to get picked is to raise your hand quietly. Once seated it is important to stay seated until the performance is finished. All electronic devices should be turned off.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE MORRISON CENTER

Students will experience a technical rehearsal of *The Nutcracker* Act 1. You will see first hand how the lighting, sound, and staging come together to create an artistic performance. The purpose of a technical rehearsal is to allow time for the production crew to work out details and make sure all production aspects are coordinated smoothly. For this reason, sometimes there are several stops and starts during the rehearsal.

INTRODUCTION TO BALLET

A dancer's body is his/her instrument for expression and it must be fine tuned to meet the demands of the codified steps and movements. A unique element to ballet training is the use of turnout. Ballet requires a dancer to turn out from the hips, calves and ankles to increase movement range and efficiency, and beauty.

IMPORTANT BALLET TERMINOLOGY

Choreography: The creation and composition of dances by arranging or inventing steps, movements, and patterns for movements.

Entrance and Exits: During the course of a ballet, dancers often enter and exit the stage at various times and places, which makes a dynamic impact.

Diagonals: Dancers often move in a diagonal on the stage so they are not flat to the front. This creates a sense of depth for the audience, which is aesthetically pleasing.

Representation of Nature: In the Land of Snow in Act 1 the dancers represent snowflakes. Their costumes are classical white tutus with hints of pale blue that shimmer under the lights. The dancers move elegantly with fluttering hands to represent snowflakes. When there are several on stage, they represent a snowstorm.

Children in Ballet: Although children are not in every ballet, Ballet Idaho's Artistic Director uses several children in his choreography of The Nutcracker. In Act 1 they first play party girls, then later represent soldiers and mice in the Battle Scene.

Solo: When a dancer takes center stage and performs alone. There are three doll solos in Act 1 during the Party Scene: The Ballerina, The Mouse King and the Nutcracker.



Pas de deux: a "step of two" is a dance duet in which two dancers, typically a male and a female, perform ballet steps together. In Act I, Clara and her Nutcracker dance a pas de deux.

Composer: One who writes the music.

Gesture: Movement of a body part or combination of parts, with an emphasis on the expressive aspects of the movement.

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

Pointe Shoes: Shoes traditionally 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. For a professional dancer, a pair of pointe shoes may only last a couple of performances!

CONVERSATIONS WITH PRINCIPAL DANCER ELIZABETH BARRETO

Elizabeth Barreto was promoted to principal dancer, making her one of four dancers who hold the title of highest rank at Ballet Idaho.

What got you started in dance?

Barreto: My mother is a dance teacher, so I basically grew up in the dance studio. I began taking ballet classes when I was 3 years old.

What is your favorite role to have danced?

Barreto: My favorite role is Princess Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty*. I performed it several times as a student, but I performed it for the first time as a professional dancer last April with Ballet Idaho. It was a dream come true and I loved every minute on stage.

Why do you dance?

Barreto: I dance because it makes me feel alive. It's part of who I am. I'm drawn to the challenge of striving for perfection in every movement, while finding ways to express my feelings at the same time. It never gets old or boring because there is always something to improve.



What else do you enjoy doing?

Barreto: When I'm not dancing, I enjoy going on long walks with my dog, Charlie, and baking delicious treats. I also sew and design dance clothing.

If you were the Artistic Director/Choreographer, what ballets would you present?

Barreto: If I were in charge of choosing a few ballets for the company to perform, these are some of my favorites: *Giselle*, *La Bayadere*, Jerome Robbins' *The Concert*, George Balanchine's *Stars and Stripes*, and anything by William Forsythe.

STORY AND HISTORY OF *THE NUTCRACKER*

ACT 1, SCENE 1

It is Christmas Eve and the Stahlbaum family decorates their splendid living room for their annual party. Their children, Clara and Fritz, rush in all aglow at the prospect of toys, magic and sweets. Soon the family is joined by all their friends and a wonderful party commences. The children perform a dance with Christmas garlands and their parents follow with a Polka.

Suddenly, at the height of the dancing, Herr Drosselmeyer appears. He is a Russian magician, a conjurer, a doll maker, a mysterious man who at first frightens the children but then enchants them with magic tricks. He surprises the guests with three mechanical dolls who perform for them: A Ballerina Doll, A Mechanical Mouse, and a handsome Nutcracker Doll. Little Clara falls in love with the Nutcracker Soldier and Drosselmeyer kindly rewards her with the doll as a gift. While Clara and her Nutcracker Doll are dancing a pas de deux, the Mechanical Mouse suddenly goes out of control. There is a terrible scuffle with the Nutcracker Doll, who is suddenly knocked out by the Mouse. He lies broken and lifeless on the floor. As the guests depart the party, Clara mourns her broken doll. Her mother hurries her off to bed. Late into the night Clara creeps quietly back into the living room to console her poor Nutcracker and falls asleep by his side. Midnight strikes and the mysterious Drosselmeyer reappears. He casts a spell over Clara and puts her in a dream like trance. Her dream turns into a nightmare as Mini Mice begin scurrying all over the living room and Drosselmeyer makes her house disappear while the Christmas tree grows to giant proportions. Clara runs to her Nutcracker and pleads with him to save her. He calls forth his army of Toy Soldiers and a battle rages with the Mice, led by their Mouse King. The Nutcracker is about to be defeated when Clara takes off her slipper and strikes the Mouse King on the shoulder to distract him – just at that moment the Nutcracker runs him through with his sword and the battle is won!

ACT 1, SCENE 2

For helping him win the battle, the Nutcracker offers to take Clara through the Land of Snow on the way to his home, the Kingdom of Sweets. They encounter the Snow Queen and King and their Court who dance the Waltz of the Snowflakes in a wintery scene.

ACT 2

Angels dance at the gates of the Land of the Sweets, followed by a team of Bakers who are working on a cake. Clara enters and is greeted by the Sugar Plum Fairy, who dances a solo. Various confections then perform their characteristic dances for Clara: Spanish Chocolate, Chinese Tea, Arabian Coffee, Marzipan Shepherdeses, Russian Candy Cane, Salt Water Taffy Sailors, and the Dewdrop Fairy and Flowers. The Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier then dance a grand pas de deux.

Finally, the entire Court dances together in a spirited finale celebrating Clara's joy and happiness.

HISTORY

The Nutcracker was first premiered on December 17, 1892 in St. Petersburg, Russia. Although the score was composed by the highly regarded Pytor Ilyitch Tchaikovsky and the choreography by Lev Ivanov, this first version was not successful. It was based on the 1816 story by E.T.A. Hoffman, *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*. The sophisticated St. Petersburg balletomanes (ballet fans) and critics thought the ballet childish and silly with a poor plot and poorly realized. As for the dancing they had to wait until the second act for the prima ballerina (best or top ballerina!)

It wasn't until 1954 when the great choreographer George Balanchine presented his version of the *The Nutcracker* in New York City, it became a sensation. It is now the most popular ballet around the world with thousands of productions each year.



Pytor Ilyitch Tchaikovsky

ACTIVITIES

CHOREOGRAPH YOUR OWN BATTLE OR SNOW QUEEN DANCE

A choreographer is a person who makes the dances. They take their ideas and put them together in movement and patterns to music creating a complete piece of art from start to finish. There have been many choreographers of *The Nutcracker* from Ivanov to Balanchine to Peter Anastos. You could even choreograph your own ballet! One popular scene in Act 1 is the battle between the Mouse King and the Nutcracker. Another contrasting dance performed by the Snow Queen follows in the Snow Scene. How would you imagine the Mouse King and Nutcracker Prince would dance in order to represent a battle? How would this contrast to the Snow Queen's dance in the Land of Snow? Come up with a movement phrase bringing out the different characteristics.



USING MATH SKILLS AS A CHOREOGRAPHER

Choreographers use math all the time, oftentimes without even realizing it. Below are some ways that choreographers may use math in *The Nutcracker*. Perhaps you can help them through their process!

- If there are 16 Snowflakes in the Snow Scene and the choreographer places 4 Snowflakes center stage, how many would he need to place on each side to create a symmetrical scene?
- If a choreographer has 48 counts to fill in the Battle Scene and gives an equal amount of counts to both the Battle Mice and Battle Soldiers, how many counts does each group have to make something up?
- A choreographer has 64 counts left to complete the Snow Pas De Deux (dance for two). During these 64 counts, he plans to give each dancer 16 counts to dance solo, and then have them dance together. Out of these 64 counts, how many counts will they be dancing together?

DESIGN YOUR OWN COSTUMES

Choose three of the following and draw what you think their costumes would look like after listening to the associated music: Party Girl, Mini Mouse, Ballerina, Doll Mouse King

WATCH AND LEARN

Have your students watch: Waltz of the Snowflakes by The Royal Ballet on YouTube. After watching the video clip, have your students describe what they saw:

- Describe the dancers' movements.
- Do the movements convey emotion?
- How does the music make you feel?
- Is the tempo fast or slow?
- How does the music influence the dancers' movements?
- Did you see some of the ballet terminology described earlier?

FOLLOW-UP SURVEY FOR STUDENTS

School: _____

How old are you? _____

Is this your first ballet performance? Yes No

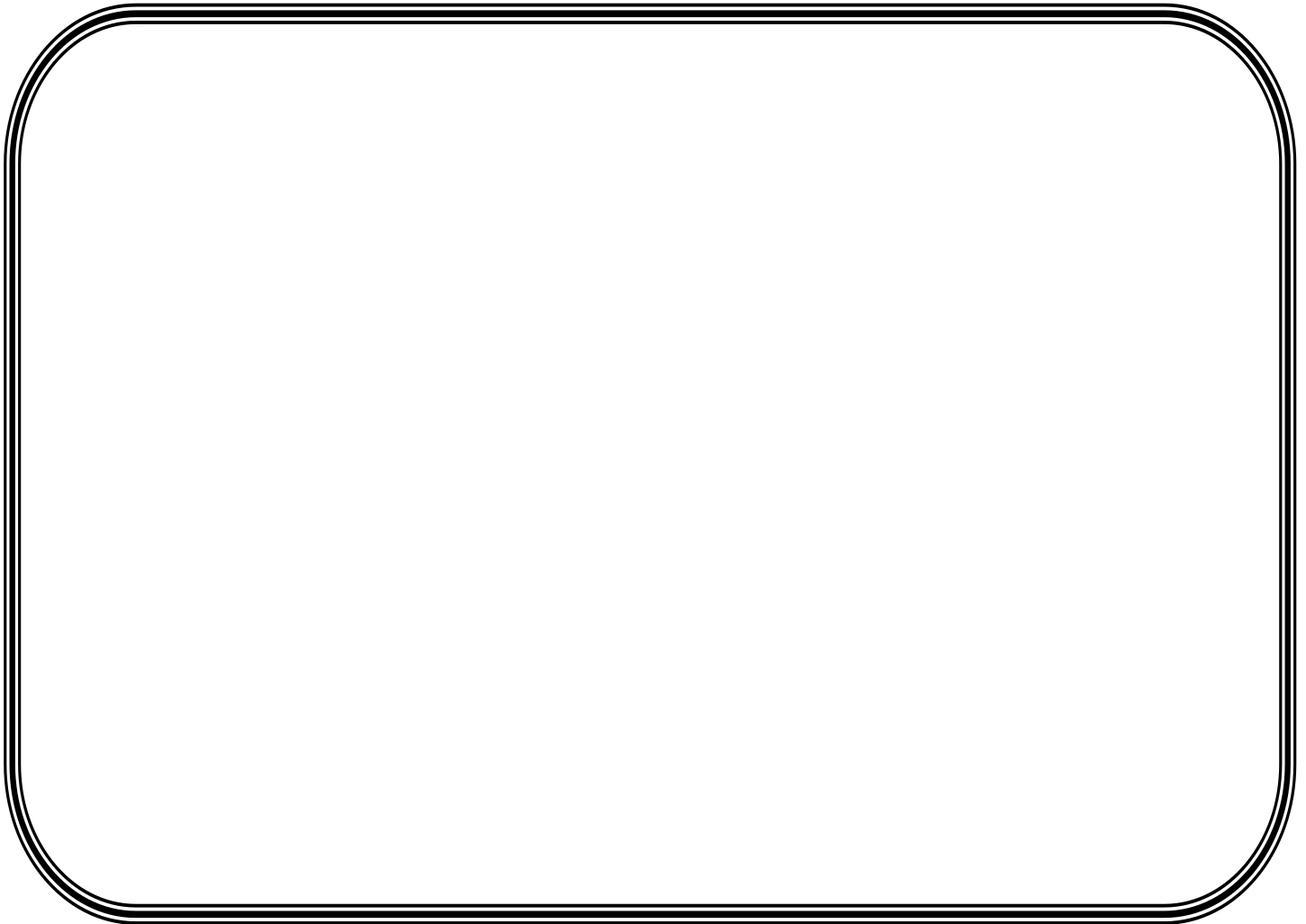
Did you enjoy the performance? Yes No

How did the dancers communicate during the performance?

Describe what it means to be an attentive audience member.

Describe your favorite part and how it made you feel.

Draw a Picture of your favorite part of the performance.



FOLLOW-UP SURVEY - FOR TEACHERS

School:

Date and title of performance: The Nutcracker (Thursday December 15th at 12:30pm)

How old are the children who attended this matinee with you? _____

Do you accompany your students to other performing or visual arts programs? ___ Yes ___ No

If yes, which ones? ___ Museums ___ Theater ___ Symphony ___ Opera ___ Other _____

I used the Study Guide in preparing students for the performance. ___ Yes ___ No

Which sections of this Guide did you find most useful? _____

Which sections of this Guide did you find least useful? _____

Was the volume of information ___ too much ___ sufficient ___ too little?

What other materials or subject matter would help you to prepare children to see the ballet?

About how much time did you spend on pre and post-performance discussion and activities with your students? ___ < 1 hour ___ 1-3 hours ___ 3-6 hours ___ > 6 hours

Describe any difference you perceive in the usefulness of this material for boys and girls.

Did you enjoy the experience? ___ Very Pleased ___ Pleased ___ Somewhat Pleased ___ Not Pleased

Why? _____

Was this your first live ballet performance? ___ Yes ___ No

Would you like to see another ballet? ___ Yes ___ No

What would make the performance a more interesting experience?

What additional information should be provided about the musicians, dancers, stage production, etc.?

Scheduling: What month, day, and performance time is most convenient for your group?

Month _____ Day of Week _____ Performance Time _____

Tell us how to improve the study guides or suggest other materials you would find useful.

Surveys may be sent to: Ballet Idaho c/o Rhonda House 501 S 8th Street Boise, ID 83702

or please contact rhouse@balletidaho.org or 208-343-0556 to organize pick up of Student and Teacher Surveys