

comes to life on Christmas Eve and wages a battle against the evil Mouse King. Hoffmann's story is darker and more troubling than the version that reached the stage; the Imperial Russian Ballet choreographer Marius Petipa chose to follow a light adaptation of the story written by Alexandre Dumas père.

Tchaikovsky began work in February 1891, continuing his efforts while on an American tour later that year for the opening of Carnegie Hall. His homeward journey took him through Paris, where he discovered a new instrument: the celesta, whose clear, bell-like tone was perfectly fitted to The Nutcracker's fairy-tale ambience. In the celesta's ethereal notes, Tchaikovsky recognized the "voice" of his Sugar Plum Fairy, and he immediately wrote to his publisher, asking that the instrument be acquired for the performance.

Selections from The Nutcracker were first performed as an orchestral suite in March 1892. The ballet proper debuted in December of that year. It was presented at St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre on a double bill with Tchaikovsky's one-act opera, *Iolanta*. In a letter to a friend, Tchaikovsky himself remarked, "Apparently the opera gave pleasure, but the ballet not really; and, as a matter of fact, in spite of all the sumptuousness it did turn out to be rather boring." He thought little of it, describing it as "infinitely worse than *Sleeping Beauty*." The reference was to the second of his three ballets; the first had been *Swan Lake*.

Yet responsibility for the failure was not, apparently, wholly the composer's. Petipa had fallen ill, and the choreography was instead devised by his less-inspired assistant. Additionally, the scenery and costumes were panned as tasteless, and the performance of the ballerina who danced the role of the Sugar Plum Fairy was widely criticized. The newspapers reviled Tchaikovsky, and he did not live to see the piece succeed. Despite the failure of its initial performance, *The Nutcracker* has become the most frequently performed of all ballets and has served as an introduction to classical music for many young people. Because the first act is set at a Christmas party, the ballet is often presented at Christmastime.



# Fiedler conducts:

**Rossini Respighi - La Boutique Fantasque**

**Rimsky-Korsakov - Suite from Le Coq D'Or**

**Tchaikovsky - Nutcracker Suite, Op. 71a**

**Arthur Fiedler / Boston Pops Orchestra**



After writing his opera *William Tell* in 1829, Rossini, while still a young man, decided to retire from full-time composition, though he continued to write piano pieces for his own amusement. The ballet music *La boutique fantasque* (*The Fantastic Toy Shop*), taken from some of these unpublished miniatures, could have no better advocate than Respighi, whose orchestral flair and Italianate bravura perfectly matched Rossini's lively tunes.

Like another nineteenth century ballet, *Coppélia* by Delibes, the ballet concerns a toy shop in which the toys come to life. A pair of can-can dancers who have been sold, respectively, to an American and a Russian family, decide to flee in order to avoid separation. Their owners return in fury, but are driven from the shop by the other toys. This pleasingly silly story is irrelevant to the music itself, which consists of an Overture followed by a set of dances -- Tarantella, Mazurka, Can-Can, Galop, and Finale. But, thanks to the enduring popularity of the ballet (written for Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*), Respighi's arrangement and deft orchestration have forestalled the almost certain extinction of this delightfully light and high-spirited music. A similar service to Rossini was later performed by Benjamin Britten in an equally sparkling version of the Tarantella.

The composer's last opera *Zolotoy petushok* or *The Golden Cockerel* is a "dramatized fable" (*nebilitsa v litsakh*), based on a imitation folk tale in verse by Pushkin. The work was prevented from being performed by the censor until after the composer's death. The materials in question were the character of a lazy autocrat involved in harebrained conflicts with invading neighboring countries, and lines in the libretto such as the mention of "a new dawn...without the Tsar" (which, nevertheless, had already appeared years before in Pushkin's published text). Because of the restriction, only the "Introduction and Wedding Procession" (*Introduction et Cortège de Noces*) were performed during the composer's lifetime. These excerpts were premiered at a Russian Symphony Concert presented under the auspices of the Belayev publishing house in February 1908.

These excerpts are masterpieces of timbral color and the artful evocation of imagery. Entering unaccompanied, two trumpets with mutes perform a fortissimo call, and are joined by two oboes in unison in their high register, creating an exotic timbre suggesting

something akin to a Middle-Eastern army band. A violin diminuendo on the sustained tone leads into a new subtle atmosphere. Muted cellos enter with a gradually descending figure. The full orchestra then unfolds a velvety impressionist landscape filled with descending high woodwinds doubled by celeste and fluttering (tremolo) violins, as the harp and bass clarinet perform ascending punctuations, a cymbal rolls, and everyone else quietly sustains low rich harmonies. The clarinets, other woodwinds, and violins exchange runs in non-Western scales underscored with harp glissandi and low string tremolos and pizzicati.

The next change in atmosphere combines the tubular bells and very high harp notes in octaves arpeggiating an unusual progression. This is punctuated by solo winds, and played in contrary motion against ascending cellos and bassoon in major and whole tone scales. The effect is plaintive and eerie, yet in a way religious. The music crescendos and suddenly breaks forth in a new setting of the trumpet call, answered in imitation by the woodwinds, and surrounded with quickly arpeggiated violins and lower strings in *sul ponticello* and then regular tremolo. The Introduction then closes on a powerful sustained unison.

"In the street, the triumphal procession begins. The king's militia come first with their important airs and bragging; next, the Queen of Chémakha's retinue; a promenade from an oriental fairy tale: certain persons that only have one eye in the middle of their forehead, others have horns, others the heads of dogs. Large and small Ethiopians, veiled slaves carry caskets and precious vessels. This strange pomp dissipates the people's anger for a moment. They are amused like children." Against drones, odd bassoon and cello pulses, bright modal melodies with sliding chromatics, sonorous brass, and gradually amassing percussion, the procession moves to a brilliant end when the king and queen finally appear.

The *Nutcracker*, Op. 71, Russian *Shchelkunchik*, ballet by Pyotr Tchaikovsky. The last of his three ballets, it was first performed in December 1892.

The story of *The Nutcracker* is loosely based on the E.T.A. Hoffmann fantasy story *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, about a girl who befriends a nutcracker that

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**Rossini - Respighi - La Boutique Fantasque**

1. Overture 4:54
2. Tarantelle 2:09
3. Vivo :39
4. Mazurka 2:21
5. Danse cosaque 2:07
6. Cancan 1:59
7. Valse lente 4:11
8. Nocturne 3:38
9. Galop 5:15

**Rimsky-Korsakov - Suite from Le Coq D'Or**

10. King Dodon In His Palace 9:34
11. King Dodon On The Battlefield 4:40
12. King Dodon With The Queen Of Shemakha 6:55
13. March 3:29

**Tchaikovsky - Nutcracker Suite**

14. Overture 3:05
15. March 2:16
16. Dance Of The Sugar-Plum Fairy 1:30
17. Russian Dance (Trépak) 1:00
18. Arabian Dance 3:37
19. Chinese Dance 1:09
20. Dance Of The Mirlitons 2:03
21. Waltz Of The Flowers 6:17

**All tracks recorded by RCA Records    Rossini - Respighi Recorded 1957**  
**Rimsky-Korsakov - Recorded in 1956    Tchaikovsky - Recorded in 1956**



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