

# Listening Lesson 3



## The Nutcracker Suite by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Based on one of the tales of E.T.A. Hoffman, the story of the Nutcracker and the Mouse King, Tchaikovsky's ballet tells the tale of a little girl, Clara, and her Christmas Eve adventures.

As is common with large works such as ballets, Tchaikovsky chose a selection of music from the ballet and created "The Nutcracker Suite" intended for concert performances.

**Q. 1** The music you will be listening to is from the second act of the ballet. Summarise the story of the first act of the ballet here. (An **act** is a section of a large work).

It is Christmas at the Stahlbaum home. Many guests come to celebrate with the family bringing gifts. Clara's Godfather is a toymaker and he brings a very special gift of a nutcracker for Clara. Her brother Fritz is jealous and he grabs for it and breaks it upsetting Clara. After the guests leave the children go to bed. Getting up during the night Clara gets her nutcracker from under the tree and falls asleep there. She then awakens to her nutcracker (a prince now) and an evil Mouse King who attacks the Nutcracker Prince. Clara saves him from the Mouse King by throwing her shoe at him. Then she and the Prince travel through the Enchanted Forest to the Kingdom of Sweets.

### "Dance of the Mirlitons"

In the ballet, this dance is one of many dances grouped together. It is played during a scene where Clara is being entertained at a sumptuous banquet.

The "Dance of the Mirlitons" (also called "Dance of the Reed Pipes" or "Dance of the Reed Flutes") is a light, pastoral dance.



**Q. 2**

What family of instruments is playing at the very beginning of this excerpt? The string family

**Q. 3** What technique are they using to play in this manner? Pizzicato

**Q. 4**

What is the time signature?  $\frac{2}{4}$  Write this at the start of the rhythm in **Q. 10**.

**Q. 5**

What instruments play the melody? Flutes

**Q. 6**

What orchestral family do they belong to? The woodwind family

**Q. 7**

What other instruments are in this family? Piccolo, oboe, bassoon and clarinet

**Q. 8** Circle the words below that describe the rhythm of the melody.

Simple    Complex    Driving    Repetitive    Relaxed    Energetic    Clear    Unclear

**Q. 9** Circle the words below that describe the tempo (speed) of this rhythm.

Fast    Slow    Very Slow    Very Fast    Moderate    Steady    Rapid

**Q. 10**

Notate the rhythm of the first eight bars of this melody. The first bar is done for you below.

Do not be confused by the glissandi, (very fast runs of notes), and grace notes, (short quiet notes before a main note), that are in this melody for decoration and are not part of the main rhythm.

### "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy"

In the ballet, this music is played during a scene where Clara and the Prince have returned to the Land of Sweets (where the Prince is ruled). The Prince tells the Sugar Plum Fairy how he was saved by Clara from the Mouse King, and is transformed back into a Prince.

**Q. 11**

What family of instruments is playing at the very beginning of this excerpt? The string family

**Q. 12**

What technique are they using to play in this manner? Pizzicato

**Q. 13**

What is the time signature of this melody? 2/4

**Q. 14**

What is the name of the instrument that plays the melody? Celeste or celesta

**Q. 15**

What does this French word mean? Heavenly

**Q. 16**

What orchestral family does it belong to? The percussion family

**Q. 17**

Describe the timbre of this instrument? Shiny, sweet, bright, clear, resonant