

Pyotr Tchaikovsky

1840-1893



Who was Pyotr Tchaikovsky?



Tchaikovsky was a Russian musician and composer. A composer is someone who writes music.

He wrote music for operas and symphonies. A symphony is a long piece of music that is played by an orchestra.

He is also famous for writing music for ballets including 'The Sleeping Beauty', 'Swan Lake' and 'The Nutcracker'.

He was the first Russian composer to be famous outside of his home country.

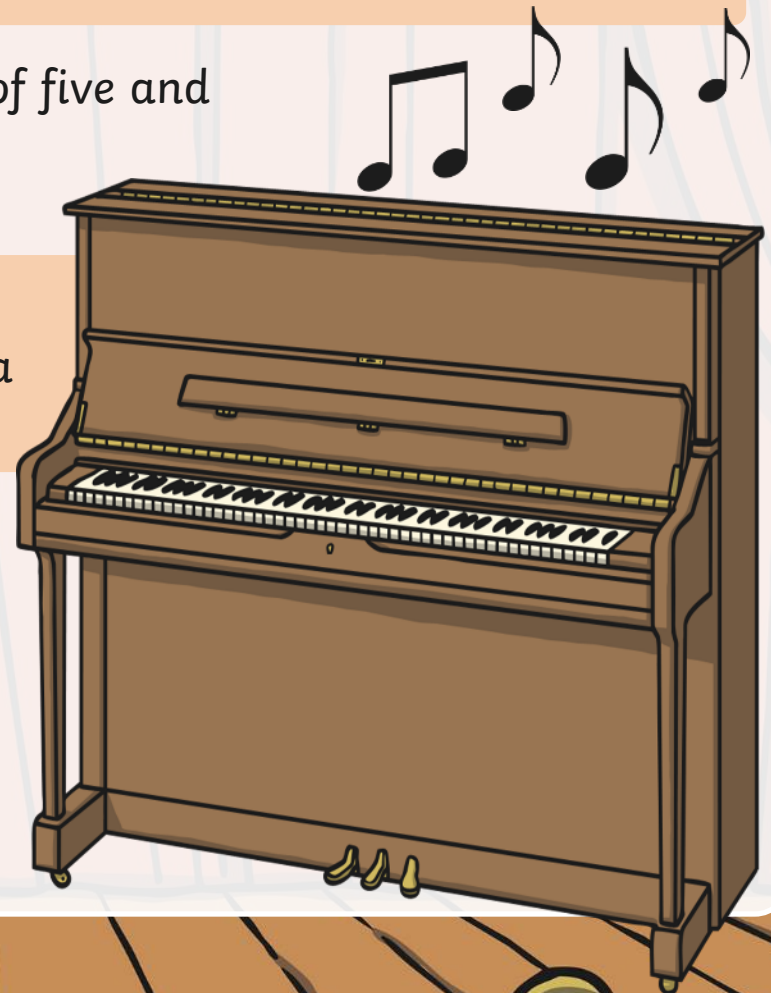
What was his life like?

Tchaikovsky grew up in Russia and had a big family. He had four brothers and two sisters.

He started playing the piano at the age of five and could play as well as his teacher in just three years!

Tchaikovsky was sent away to boarding school at the age of ten so he could get a job working for the government.

He continued to enjoy playing music. When he was 14, his mother died. He composed a piece of music and dedicated it to her.



What was his life like?

After school, Tchaikovsky got a job working for the government. When a new music school opened, in a Russian city called St Petersburg, he gave up his job in order to study music.

After Tchaikovsky finished his own studies, he began to teach music to other students. He continued to compose his own music, which became very popular.



What was his life like?

Even though Tchaikovsky knew that he loved men instead of women, he got married to a lady called Antonina Miliukova in 1877. At the time, it was against the law for a man to have a romantic relationship with another man. Tchaikovsky hoped that getting married to a woman might make him happy but it didn't. Their marriage was very unhappy and only lasted a few months.

Tchaikovsky became a very famous composer. The ruler of Russia came to some of his concerts and Tchaikovsky was invited to visit the USA and various European countries.

He died in 1893 when he was 53 years old.



'The Nutcracker'

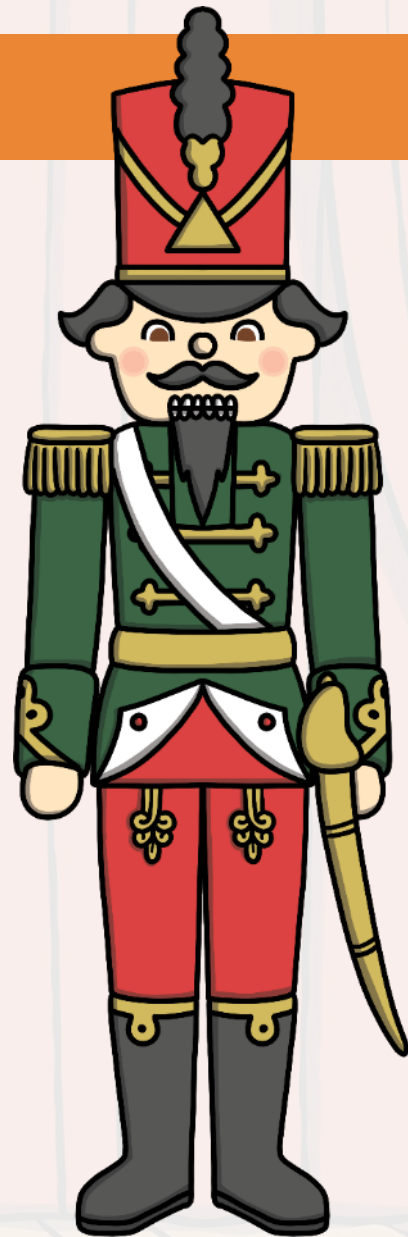
Alongside 'Swan Lake', 'The Nutcracker' is one of Tchaikovsky's most famous works.

It is a ballet and was first performed in 1892.

The story is set on Christmas Eve, which makes it a popular ballet around Christmastime.

At first, not many people liked the dancing but they still enjoyed the music.

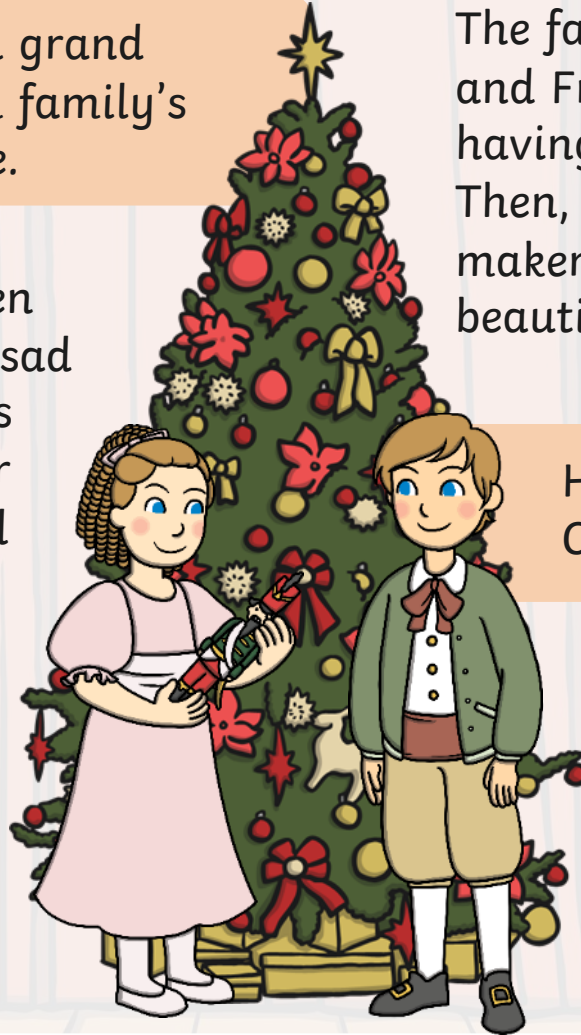
It has become incredibly famous and has been performed in many different styles all over the world.



The Story

The story begins with a grand party in the Stahlbaum family's house on Christmas Eve.

When the dolls are taken away, the children are sad but Drosselmeyer leaves them with a Nutcracker toy. Clara loves the doll but Fritz deliberately breaks it.



The family's children, Clara and Fritz, are dancing and having fun with their friends. Then, Drosselmeyer, the toy maker, arrives with the most beautiful, lifesize dolls.

He and a heartbroken Clara go to bed.

The Story

Later that night, Clara returns to check on the wounded Nutcracker. She finds him and some tin soldiers alive and fighting a battle with the Mouse King and his army of mice.

With Clara's help, the tin soldiers win. The Nutcracker is turned into a prince!

He leads Clara away through the Land of Snow to the Land of Sweets.



The Story



When they arrive, the Prince tells the Sugar Plum Fairy how Clara saved him and a celebration is held in her honour.

Many different sweets from all over the world perform different dances. After that, the Sugar Plum Fairy, who has ruled the land while the Prince was away, performs a dance with her Cavalier.

In the end, all the sweets dance a waltz together and Clara and the Prince are crowned rulers of the Land of Sweets.

Listen to It

Several of the pieces of music from 'The Nutcracker' are famous and have been used in films, adverts and television shows. Listen to some of these pieces. Have you heard them before? Do you like them? Explain why. How do they make you feel?

The pieces are:

- 'Overture'
- 'The Dance of the Reed Flutes'
- 'Waltz of the Flowers'
- 'The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy'



