

The Complete Nutcracker Ballet Music

IT is Christmas Eve. All is happy expectation in the house of Town Council President Silberhaus and his wife, who are busy with preparations for a party for their children and neighbours. The guests begin to arrive and the Christmas trees are festively lighted. Thus the famous Tchaikovsky ballet *The Nutcracker* begins.

Ever since *The Nutcracker* was first performed in December, 1892, at the Maryinsky, the Imperial Theatre of St. Petersburg—when five of the numbers had to be repeated in response to overwhelming applause—the Suite taken from the colourful score has remained one of the best-loved of orchestral works. Yet the whole ballet score remains very little known and the ballet itself is most frequently presented in an abbreviated version.

The story which Tchaikovsky was asked to set for the ballet was a French adaptation of E. T. A. Hoffmann's fairy tale *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*. The composer was not very happy about having to work from a scenario with a German small-town background, and it was more than a year before he was satisfied with it. A change of choreographers just before the première made matters more difficult for the opening, and was respons-

ible, in part, for the ballet's comparative failure on the first night. The remarkable musical score, however, won high favour.

The score of *The Nutcracker* is one of Tchaikovsky's most unusual in coloration and orchestral texture. His familiar melodic style is very much in evidence throughout the intense and passionate *Pas de Deux*, and the *Waltz of the Snowflakes*, which is certainly a strong competitor to the famous *Waltz of the Flowers*. However, there are countless pages in the score which represent new and unusual departures—some almost bizarre—in scoring and melody. In the woodwinds particularly Tchaikovsky uses novel instrumental combinations. As well, *The Nutcracker* calls for the use of children's toy instruments in the Christmas Party scene; an actual gunshot which signals the opening of the battle between the Nutcracker and the Mouse King; and a wordless chorus of women's voices used to picture the sound of wind in the trees during the *Snowflake Waltz*.

However, the innovation of which Tchaikovsky was most proud was, of course, the use of the celesta which he had obtained secretly from Mustel in Paris, fearing that Rimsky-Korsakov might get wind of the idea and be the first to make use of the novel instrument's glistening tones. In the ballet it is heard in the scenes where the Sugar-Plum Fairy appears—not only in her *Dance*, but also in all the other *Fairyland Scenes*. Tchaikovsky's use of the wind choir to produce odd and grotesque effects is especially notable in the episodes where the Town Councillor Drosselmeyer brings his animated dolls to life. The music for the *Midnight Scene*, where the room and Christmas tree become magically transformed into the battle ground for the armies of the Nutcracker and the Mouse King is considered to be equalled in evocative colouring only by the wonderful *Queen Mab Scherzo* of Berlioz.

Those who think they know their Tchaikovsky may have to think again when they hear this first complete recording by the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra under Antal Dorati. Among the novelties there are the children's

Galop, the various waltz episodes, and Clara's touching *Lullaby* from the first tableau; the magic transformation scene and *Snowflake Waltz*; and the fairyland scenes. Most of the items in the *Diversissement* which the Sugar-Plum Fairy who rules the Kingdom of Sweets provides for Clara and her Nutcracker Prince in the last act are familiar from the *Suite*, except for the *Spanish Dance* (Chocolate) and the delightful *Dance of the Clowns*. The latter is titled in French in the score as *La mère Gigogne et les polichinelles*. The Mother Gigogne referred to is a celebrated personage in French children's folklore—a prolific lady whose countless children were said to have been irrepressible acrobats. The *Pas de Deux* of the Sugar-Plum Fairy and the Nutcracker Prince is remarkable not only for its lyrical intensity but also as an example of what genius can accomplish with a simple descending scale.

To return to the story of the ballet itself, on the night of the party the children come into the drawing-room for the presentation of gifts to the music of the *March of the Toys*. The parents join in the merriment and there is a *Galop* for the children and a sort of *Polonaise* for their elders, played sim-

ultaneously. Councillor Drosselmeyer, a kindly old man, brings in four life-sized dolls—Harlequin, Columbine, a Soldier and a Vivandière—who do a *Waltz* and a *Russian Dance* for the delighted children. Clara, the daughter of the house, is given a charmingly grotesque Nutcracker, and she is enchanted with it.

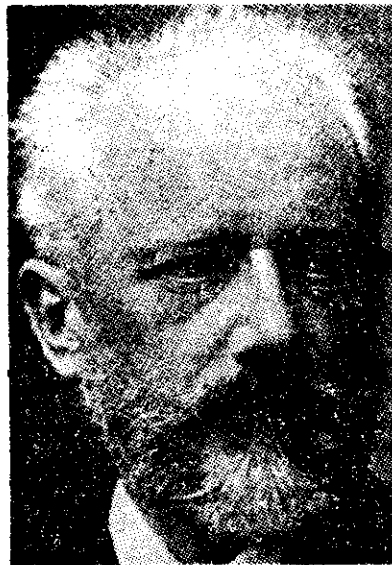
Clara's brother Franz and the other boys are jealous, however. They snatch the Nutcracker away from her and it is broken. Greatly distressed, Clara recovers it, cares for it and sings it a tender lullaby. At last the signal is given for the traditional *Grossvater* (Grandfather) dance, which means the end of the party and bedtime for the children. As the stage grows dark, lighted only by the lovely glow of the tree ornaments, Clara creeps in. She cannot sleep for worry over her beloved Nutcracker. The clock strikes midnight, she hears the scurry of mice and all at once the tree grows enormously in size and the toys come to life. There is a tremendous battle between the mice and the toys, under the generalship of the Nutcracker. When it looks as though he is being overcome Clara throws her slipper and destroys the Mouse King. Suddenly there is a miraculous transformation. The Nutcracker becomes a Prince and with all ceremony he invites Clara to his Kingdom of Sweets. Clara and her



Prince fly over the snow-clad forest where the snowflakes become living creatures, led by a magnificent King and Queen. This dazzling scene is followed by a celebration at the Kingdom of Sweets with a brilliant *Final Waltz* and *Apotheosis*, in which the courtiers pay tribute to Clara for saving their Prince.

Antal Dorati, who conducts the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra in *The Nutcracker*, is a talented and versatile conductor, well known for his interest in modern music. His ballet arrangements include the frequently performed "Graduation Ball," and he has also composed orchestral and other instrumental music and songs. He was born in Budapest in 1906, and studied at the Budapest Academy of Music with Bartok and Weiner. At 18 he made his debut as conductor of the Budapest Royal Opera. Among his appointments have been five seasons, beginning 1935, conducting the Monte Carlo Russian Ballet at Covent Garden and on tour in Europe, Australia and New York (he visited New Zealand in 1939 with the Covent Garden Russian Ballet); conductor of the revived Dallas (Texas) Symphony Orchestra, which he made one of the leading orchestras in the country; and then in 1949 he succeeded Dimitri Mitropoulos as conductor of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra.

The first broadcast by the NZBS of the complete music to *The Nutcracker* ballet will be heard from ZB stations at 10.5 p.m. on Sunday, May 22.



TCHAIKOVSKI

