

The Nutcracker

OPAS brings Tchaikovsky's masterpiece to Aggieland

BY MARIUM MOHIUDDIN
The Battalion

The Russian monarchy under Czar Nicholas II, subsidized the arts and were loyal patrons of great European ballets during the late 19th century. The entire royal family was present for the ballet productions presented each weekend.

Dr. Olga Cooke, an associate professor of Russian, said ballet is the greatest art form given to America by Russia.

"The Russian ballet did have Western influences," she said. "There was a decline in France and Italy, and the Russian Imperial Ballet became up-and-coming in ballet. Before the Russian Revolution, they were the greatest in the world when it came to the arts."

Cooke said the beauty of Russian ballet stems from their training.

"Since a young age, Russians are groomed and trained, so by the time they reach 17, they are impeccably trained," Cooke said.

"Their dancing has a sense of interpretation that is so musical and fluid. No one does it like the Russians."

She said the Moscow City Ballet will offer a good performance because of its nationality.

"They embody that beauty and the superb technicality," she said.

The Moscow City Ballet consists of 65 dancers and was founded in 1989 by Victor Smirnov-Golovanov, a graduate of the Moscow School of Choreography and a former soloist of 20 years for the Bolshoi Ballet.

This fall is the ballet's North American debut tour. The company is dedicated to

Russia's classical ballet tradition, but also incorporates its own style and ideas.

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky had an immense impact upon Russian ballet and is considered by experts to be among the five greatest composers of the 19th century.

Born in the Ural Mountains of Russia, Tchaikovsky is one of the world's most famous composers because of his universal appeal, Cooke said.

"Tchaikovsky ballet have been accessible to the whole world," she said.

Tchaikovsky completed *Swan Lake* in 1877 and in 1890 staged *Sleeping Beauty* in St. Petersburg. He received a request to compose a ballet from E.T.A. Hoffman's story *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, about a girl named Marie who is from a loveless household and fights battles against a mouse king with seven heads.

Tchaikovsky declined the invitation because he felt the original story was not suitable for a ballet. However, he changed his mind when he was offered a revised version of the story by Alexandre Dumas and saw a choreographed version of Marius Petipa.

On Dec. 7, 1892, the first dress rehearsal of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* was held. Tchaikovsky suffered bouts of depression when the ballet and opera opened to luke warm receptions.

The composer wrote to his brother Anatoly: "This is the fourth day on which the periodicals have been carving up my latest creations.... It is not the first time. The abuse does not annoy me at all, and yet — as always under these circumstances — I am in a hateful state of mind."

Despite its disappointing initial reception, *The Nutcracker* has become a staple of the holiday season, Cooke said.

"There is not much to the Nutcracker, it has a predictable storyline, and there is not much virtuosity," she said. "But it has a lasting appeal because of the memories of Christmas and childhood."

Sara Peeples, OPAS public relations director and a junior accounting major, said



PHOTO COURTESY OF MSC OPAS

Clara, the Prince and Herr Drosselmeyer pose at the end of *The Nutcracker* ballet.

the board chose this production because of the holiday season.

"It is so familiar to people, and it is perfect for the season," she said. "It is a good family event, because it is for everyone. We try not to repeat production often, but this has always been a huge success."

The Nutcracker begins on Christmas Eve, where Dr. Silbergus has prepared a party for his daughter Clara.

The party's guest of honor is her uncle Herr Drosselmeyer, who arrives with many gifts, among them is a book titled *The Nutcracker and the Mouse-King*, with which Clara becomes enthralled.

Drosselmeyer then brings mechanical toys into the room, among them are the Nutcracker, the Mouse-King and a doll. With a wave of his wand they begin to dance.

The guests watch the Mouse-King come to life and challenge the Nutcracker for the right to dance with the doll.

Clara's brother, Fritz, challenges the Nutcracker to a duel and the doll is damaged. During the fight the dolls are covered up, and Drosselmeyer comforts Clara by saying there will be a surprise for her that night.

Later in the evening, after the guests have left, Clara sneaks back to the Christmas tree. At the stroke of midnight, strange things begin to happen.

MSC OPAS presents Moscow City Ballet's *The Nutcracker* today at 7:30 p.m. and tomorrow at 2 and 7:30 p.m. in Rudder Auditorium.

For tickets, call 845-1234 or toll-free at 888-890-5667 or order online at opas.tamu.edu.



Clara (Center) plays with her Christmas present, the Nutcracker, as Herr Drosselmeyer, her uncle and the party guests look on, in Moscow City Ballet's *The Nutcracker*.

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