The Nutcracker ([Russian](#): **Щелкунчик**, *Schelkunchik*) is a two-act [ballet](#), originally choreographed by [Marius Petipa](#) and [Lev Ivanov](#) with a score by [Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky](#). The libretto is adapted from [E.T.A. Hoffmann](#)'s story "[The Nutcracker and the Mouse King](#)". It was given its premiere at the [Mariinsky Theatre](#) in St. Petersburg on 18 December 1892, on a double-bill with Tchaikovsky's opera, *[Iolanta](#)*.[1]

Although the original production was not a success, the twenty-minute suite that Tchaikovsky extracted from the ballet was. However, the complete *Nutcracker* has enjoyed enormous popularity since the mid-20th century and is now performed by countless ballet companies, primarily during the [Christmas](#) season, especially in the U.S.[2] Tchaikovsky's score has become one of his most famous compositions, in particular the pieces featured in the suite.[3] Among other things, the score is noted for its use of the [celesta](#), an instrument that the composer had already employed in his much lesser known [symphonic ballad](#) *The Voyevoda*. Although known primarily as the featured solo instrument in the "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy" from Act II of *The Nutcracker*, it is also employed elsewhere in the same act. [4]