

The nutcracker ballet

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The paper " Russian Ballet History: The Nutcracker " is a worthy example of an essay on performing arts. " The Nutcracker" Ballet is a standard ic for the Holiday Season. Composed in 1892, the ballet by Tchaikovsky, tells the story of Clara and her dream world with the Nutcracker Prince based on the tale " The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" by E. T. A. Hoffmann. As a work that reflects his time, " the Nutcracker" is still generally presented in period costume with elaborate sets and a sense of upper-middle-class affluence. During the period of the Russian Tsars in the late 19th Century, the ballet was a fashionable entertainment, and Tchaikovsky was one of the more popular composers, using fairy tales and well-known fables for his subjects. His richly composed music reflects the opulence of the upper classes of Russia. Politically, Alexander II had begun a series of liberal reforms and the Russian people were often in a better position than citizens of other European countries. "...the existence of plans by Alexander II for a limited constituent assembly and his other reforms of the 1860s and 70s would tend to suggest that liberal reforms were possible in Russia, even if they were a response to the catastrophe in the Crimean War." While the seat of artistic culture was mainly found in Paris, Russian ballet was gaining ground as a high art form. " The Nutcracker Suite" dances in the second act are reflective of other cultures as interest grew in exploring the world and forms of travel and communication improved. Ballet while previously restricted to the upper classes has become increasingly accessible to the general public and as such has appeal to members of the public from all socio-economic backgrounds. The arts offer us the opportunity to shift our minds from current events and participate in a transformative process. Attending the ballet, many people

are fairly well-dressed, but there are also people wearing jeans and sweaters and the audience includes people of all ages. This diversity illustrates how the arts have changed over time. In the past, it was expected that people would wear their finest clothes to public performances; in our time people are comfortable in more casual attire.

The music begins and the stage is set for the opening Christmas Party. Rich in color and texture, the sets and the large Christmas tree invoke the happiness of the party. The costuming is in period style: the men in long coats and the women and girls in full dresses. Reflecting the era and the opulence of the more affluent in late 19th Century Europe, the performance highlights how the arts were influenced by the patrons who attended performances. Much visual art of the day also demonstrated how patronage influenced artists; portraits often illustrated well-dressed subjects.

While there are productions of the Nutcracker that are more modern in the context of sets and design, more traditional examples are a better representative of the cultural norms of the day. This production falls within those parameters through the lavish costumes and textures that fit the equally lavish music.

The second act contains most of what we know as the Nutcracker Suite. There are a series of dances intended to represent different parts of the world. While today we might interpret stereotypical aspects to the music, at the time, imitating the musical forms and styles of other cultures and countries was popular. This is due to growth and interest in other cultures as communication and travel improved.

Dance as an art form has very old roots. “ In Russia, Peter the Great decided

to begin to evolve the arts in his country at the end of the 17th century. Artists from other countries were invited to Russia at this time to help modernize the country.” The Nutcracker was not immediately accepted. “The first production of The Nutcracker was a failure: neither critics nor the audience liked it. However, future productions proved more popular.” Today, Tchaikovsky’s ballets are considered classics among the standard repertoire. We attend the ballet for similar reasons to the patrons of the past: a diversion from everyday life and a form of simple enjoyment. The story of a young girl, a handsome prince and a magical land inspires a sense of innocence and wonder. While previously, the ballet was considered for the upper class, it has become an art form that is readily accessible by most people regardless of socio-economic status. Although dance companies may struggle financially, performances of the Nutcracker are often sold out due to its popularity, longevity, and reflection of the period in which it was written. Regardless of the politics of any period, art and culture have always had the ability to transcend and/or reflect current events. While the Nutcracker was composed during a period where much of Europe was struggling with poverty and war, and today as we deal with similar issues, the arts have the ability to move us beyond those struggles and allow everyone the opportunity to participate and be a part of a transformative experience.