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Hello, hello! Welcome to episode 9 of Busy Kids Love Music, an educational podcast for music-loving families. I'm Carly Seifert, the creator of Busy Kids Do Piano, and I'm excited to have you hear with me today.

For many families, attending a performance of the famous ballet *The Nutcracker* by Russian composer Tchaikovsky is a much loved holiday tradition during the month of December. In today's episode of Busy Kids Love Music, we're going to do a sort of "musical synopsis" of the ballet, where I will summarize some of the major scenes of the show and share portions of some of the musical selections as we go.

Our ballet opens on Christmas Eve as an upbeat March is played. Party guests begin to gather at the Stahlbaum's house for a party. The Stahlbaum children – Clara and Fritz – are excited to have friends and family for their annual gathering. The adults visit elegantly and admire the decorations and food as the children run around and play, anxious to begin opening Christmas presents. The adults and children each perform a dance as a group.

Soon, a mysterious, cloaked guest arrives to the party. It is Godfather Drosselmeyer, the toymaker. He then presents two life-sized dolls who perform a dance for the children. He then gives each child a toy – for the girls he brings dolls and for the boys, bugles. For Clara and Fritz, he brings extra special gifts. Fritz receives a beautiful drum, and Clara, a special nutcracker doll. Fritz is jealous of Clara's nutcracker, and begins to toss it around with the other boys. Before long, the nutcracker breaks. Godfather Drosselmeyer repairs the doll with his handkerchief and makes a little bed for the doll to rest on as he recovers.

Eventually the guests begin to leave the party and the Stahlbaum family heads to bed. Clara falls asleep under the Christmas tree with her nutcracker doll in her arms.

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When the clock strikes midnight, Clara awakes to a frightening scene. The Christmas tree is growing, the toys have come to life and mice fill the room – large mice dressed in army uniforms. Clara’s nutcracker has also come to life. Do you hear how the music is getting more exciting in this scene? Suddenly, Clara finds herself in the middle of a battle. The Nutcracker leads the toy soldiers to battle the Mouse King and his army of mice. When it seems as though the Nutcracker is about to be defeated, Clara throws her slipper at the Mouse King, hitting him on the head. He falls to the ground and is carried off by his army of mice.

Our music begins to change as does the scene. The bed turns into a magical sleigh and the Nutcracker is turned into a prince. He takes Clara to a snowy pine forest where snowflakes dance around them as Act I comes to a close.

As Act II of *The Nutcracker* begins, we have our first glimpse of The Land of Sweets. Clara and her prince are greeted by the Sugar Plum Fairy. The prince tells the fairy about the battle against the army of mice and brags about Clara’s bravery in throwing her slipper at the Mouse King, defeating him and saving the Nutcracker’s life. The Sugar Plum Fairy expresses her admiration for Clara’s bravery, and throws a festival in their honor. During this festival, they are presented with candy and treated to celebratory dances.

Our dances begin with the Spanish dancers. Trumpets and castanets play and the dancers present the duo with chocolate.

Our next gift is coffee from Arabia. The female dancers in this dance number typically wear veils and move their bodies like rising steam to the music. What are some words you would use to describe the mood of this music?

Next up is the Chinese dance, where our duo is given the gift of tea. A chorus of flutes play a cheerful melody for these tea dancers.

Our next group of dancers are Russian dolls performing a dance called a Trepak. This fast dance is often a crowd favorite, as the dancers flip and leap across the stage to the exciting music, which makes use of Ukrainian folk melodies.

Following the exciting Russian Dance, “Dance of the Reed Flutes” begins. Dancers often use reed flutes as props in their dance or as part of their costumes. This piece is one of the most well-known musical numbers from *The Nutcracker*. If you listen carefully, my guess is that you will hear this piece played a lot during the month of December! Listen for it in commercials or holiday themed television shows.

At this point in the show, a tall woman with a giant hoop skirt saunters onto the stage. She is a giant gingerbread house — known as Mother Ginger. She lifts her hoop skirt and her gingerbread children — called polichinelles — emerge and begin to dance around her. After Mother Ginger and her children exit the stage, a new piece begins.

Do you hear the gentle harp? As it plays, dancers dressed as flowers begin to flutter onto the stage. The flowers dance in patterns across the stage. What are some words you would use to describe this music? I think it sounds very elegant and magical.

This “Waltz of the Flowers” is the last of the group dance numbers. A strong cavalier now enters the stage and performs a powerful dance with the Sugar Plum Fairy. As the two conclude their dance, the Sugar Plum Fairy performs her own solo dance. As you listen to this music, can you imagine how she dances?

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She dances lighter than air! That fairy-like instrument you hear is called a celeste. The celeste looks like a piano, but when you play a key, the hammer strikes a metal chime bar. Doesn't it sound magical?

Everyone from the Land of Sweets comes together in the finale to bid Clara farewell in a final dance. As the finale comes to a close, Clara awakens from her dream with her nutcracker doll by her side, wondering if it was all just a dream.

I hope you've enjoyed learning the story of The Nutcracker and listening to some of Tchaikovsky's beautiful music from the ballet. Be sure to download this episode's listening calendar, which includes links to performances of The Nutcracker as well as some unique interpretations of Tchaikovsky's music from the play. You can get your hands on that listening calendar by visiting busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/9. Be sure to also check out my Nutcracker Camp for Kids, which I'll link to in my show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/9.

If you enjoyed today's episode, please be sure to rate and review our podcast on iTunes. Thank you so much for joining me today, and I look forward to seeing you again in 2 weeks on the Busy Kids Love Music Podcast!