

Matthew Lehmann as The Nutcracker Prince and Claire Voss as the Sugar Plum Fairy.



## THE SUMGGLED INSTRUMENT...

The score of *The Nutcracker* is noted for its use of the Celesta, the uniquely twinkling instrument you hear in The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy scene in Act II.

Tchaikovsky discovered this new instrument in Paris and as soon as he heard the clear, bell-like tone which perfectly fitted *The Nutcracker's* fairy-tale ambience he wrote a letter to his publisher stating,

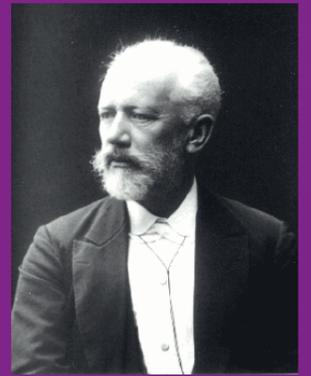
**"I have discovered a new instrument in Paris, something between a piano and a glockenspiel, with a divinely beautiful tone... have it sent direct to St Petersburg; but no one there must know about it. I am afraid Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazounov might hear of it and make use of the new effect before I could. I expect the instrument will make a tremendous sensation."**

Celesta, also spelled celeste and pronounced "Che-less-ta" is an orchestral percussion instrument resembling a small upright piano. It consists of a series of small metal bars (making it a metallophone) with a keyboard and a simplified piano action in which small felt hammers strike the bars.

Each bar is resonated by a wooden box or similar chamber tuned to reinforce the fundamental harmonic (component tone) of the bar. A pedal lifts a felt-pad damper from the bars, permitting use of either sustained or short notes. The normal range is four octaves upward from middle C.

Tchaikovsky's plan for concealment of the instrument and a grand reveal worked! In the Celesta's ethereal notes, Tchaikovsky recognised the "voice" of the Sugar Plum Fairy. A year later, at the premiere of *The Nutcracker* in St Petersburg, the Sugar-Plum Fairy appeared on the stage and the magical sound emerged from the pit. The audience was in total awe. No one had heard of this mysterious sound!

Although it has now become a standard instrument often found in symphony halls across the world and in film scores such as the Harry Potter series, it will forever be linked to this famous ballet thanks to a well-kept secret.



**Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**

Composer

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, a name familiar to any classical ballet enthusiast, was born in 1840 in Votkinsk, a small town in the Russian Empire.

As a composer of ballets, Tchaikovsky was not an initial success. His first, *Swan Lake* (1875) was met with little enthusiasm.

Despite this setback, he didn't hesitate to accept a commission from Ivan Alexandrovitch Vsevolozhsky, Director of the Imperial Theatres in St. Petersburg to compose for *The Sleeping Beauty* (1889).

Following the success of *The Sleeping Beauty* he went on to compose *The Nutcracker* (1892).