

A.V.A. Ballet Theatre and
the Reno Philharmonic Orchestra
Present

The Nutcracker



December 2024

2024 FAMILY GUIDE

A.V.A. BALLET THEATRE
ALYSSA VAN ALSTYNE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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Welcome to A.V.A. Ballet Theatre

As part of our effort to introduce young people to the magic of ballet, A.V.A. Ballet Theatre is pleased to offer this *The Nutcracker* Family Guide. A.V.A. Ballet Theatre's *The Nutcracker* Family Guide includes materials for education and activities for children to learn about this classical ballet performance prior to attending the ballet. We encourage teachers and families to use this guide before and after the performance to familiarize children with A.V.A. Ballet Theatre's production of *The Nutcracker* and with ballet as an art form.

It is our hope that this Family Guide combined with the classical ballet performance of *The Nutcracker* fosters an appreciation and understanding of dance. To learn more about A.V.A. Ballet Theatre, visit us online at <http://www.avaballet.com>.

A.V.A. Ballet Theatre's annual classical ballet production of *The Nutcracker* is a wonderful way to celebrate and experience the transformative power of creativity through the performing arts. We are delighted to share the beauty and joy of dance and celebrate the holiday season with you.

Parents and teachers may send letters telling us about yours and your children's experience (see "After the Performance – Activity Pages" for details) to:

A.V.A. Ballet Theatre
Attn: Steve Trounday, Vice President
P.O. Box 9486
Reno, NV 89507

We look forward to seeing you at *The Nutcracker*!



About A.V.A. Ballet Theatre

Founded by Alexander Van Alstyne in 1994 and incorporated as a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation in 2002, A.V.A. Ballet Theatre is northern Nevada's largest professional ballet company located in Reno, Nevada. Over the past two decades, A.V.A. Ballet Theatre has established a reputation for artistic excellence, innovative choreography, and originality due to our professional faculty who have years of performing experience in prominent metropolitan ballet and professional dance companies across the United States and Europe. We are the resident ballet company of the Pioneer Center for the Performing Arts. Every classical ballet production is set against the lush backdrop of a 40-piece orchestra provided by the Reno Philharmonic Orchestra.

Each season, A.V.A. Ballet Theatre offers four (three classical ballets and one contemporary ballet) celebrated, unique, and significant productions to northern Nevada citizens. Our performances have included *The Nutcracker*, *The Frozen Snow Queen*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, *Coppélia*, *The Secret Garden*, *Swan Lake*, *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. In 2007, we added *Vortex: The Ballet That Rocks*, a free contemporary ballet held at the Robert Z. Hawkins Foundation Amphitheater at Bartley Ranch Regional Park during Artown.

All performances showcase guest professional dancers who are cast for the starring roles in each production from the San Francisco Ballet, Diablo Ballet, Ballet West, the Joffrey Ballet, Houston Ballet, North Carolina Ballet, San Antonio Ballet and Tokyo Ballet, to name a few; and more than 40 professional and pre-professional dancers from around the region. The corps de ballet, approximately 20 dancers comprised mostly of students from University of Nevada, Reno, are key figures in every ballet. A.V.A Ballet Theatre also has a pre-professional dance organization for teens who aspire to seek a career in dance.

A.V.A. Ballet Theatre's goal is to elevate the appreciation of ballet and the performing arts in general as we believe that exposure to the performing arts is a vital element in creating a healthy, vibrant community.

The Biggest Little Ballet Company in the World®

Attending a Ballet Performance

After weeks of rehearsal, A.V.A. Ballet Theater is excited to perform *The Nutcracker* for our audience! To make it the best experience for the dancers and audience members, please remember the following important things when going to the ballet:

- ❄ The theatre where the ballet is held is a big theatre – with 1,500 seats;
- ❄ The lights dim before the performance begins, and the theatre remains dark during the ballet performance;
- ❄ Audience members are expected to sit quietly in their seats;
- ❄ Audience members are not allowed to take pictures or videos, as this can be distracting to the dancers and other audience members;
- ❄ Cell phones and electronics should be turned off when before the show begins;
- ❄ Please use the restroom before the performance begins or wait until intermission;
- ❄ The story is told through movement, music, costumes, and sets;
- ❄ Ballet is a live performance – there are no second takes and dancers can react to the audience;
- ❄ Let the dancers know you appreciate their hard work by clapping when you enjoy something, laugh if something is funny, and give a standing ovation at the end if the show was amazing;
- ❄ At the end of the performance, the dancers take a bow;
- ❄ Some people make their visit to the ballet a dress-up occasion, other dress casually.

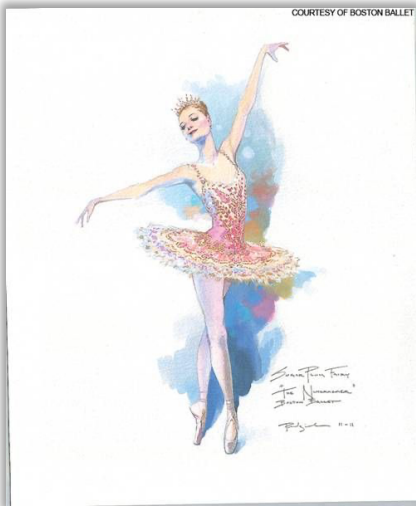
Most of all...

Enjoy the movement, music, sets, costumes – and HAVE FUN!!

Careers in the World of Dance

It takes many different people to make a ballet performance come to life. These are the jobs at of the people who make A.V.A. Ballet Theatre's productions:

- ❖ **Artistic Director:** Responsible for deciding the theme/story of the ballet; provides guidance and works in collaboration with all other groups.
- ❖ **Choreographers:** Creates the movements and teaches them to the dancers.
- ❖ **Dancers:** Responsible for rehearsing and performing the choreography.
- ❖ **Set Designers:** Creates the look for the stage including lights, backdrops, and set.
- ❖ **Costume Designers:** Creates the design for the costumes.



Sugar Plum Fairy Sketch by Robert Perdziola for Boston Ballet's Nutcracker with Mikko Nissinen's re-imagined sets and costumes.



Costume design for the Nutcracker, Houston Ballet. Artist: Desmond Heely, British, 1931-2016

- ❖ **Conductor:** Leads the orchestra and assists the choreographer in selecting music.



Laura Jackson will conduct the Reno Philharmonic for A.V.A. Ballet Theatre's production of *The Nutcracker*.

Ms. Jackson continues to win praise for her artistry, leadership, innovative programming, and creative community engagement.

Creating a Ballet Production

Each year, A.V.A. Ballet Theatre produces three classical ballet performances at the Pioneer Center for the Performing Arts and a contemporary ballet during Artown in July at the Robert Z. Hawkins Amphitheater at Bartley Ranch. The process of creating a ballet begins years in advance.

First, the dates of each of the three classical ballet performance are determined with the Pioneer Center for the Performing Arts and the Reno Philharmonic. Once dates are secured, we select the ballets to perform. Our holiday favorite, *The Nutcracker*, is produced every December—usually the second weekend of the month. For the spring and fall classical ballet productions, we choose from *Sleeping Beauty*, *Peter Pan*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Swan Lake*, *The Frozen Snow Queen*, *Cinderella*, *Coppélia* and *Alice in Wonderland*. We try not to repeat each ballet until several years have gone by.

Approximately three months prior to a production, auditions are scheduled and the cast is set. Because each ballet is different, the cast is chosen based on various character parts such as the mice and soldiers in *The Nutcracker* or parts where the dancers must be very skilled and dance en pointe. A.V.A. Ballet Theatre brings in guest principal dancers from big city ballets to help fill the roles needed. Once the cast has been selected, rehearsals begin and continue until the performance dates. The orchestra also rehearses the music score for each ballet.

At the same time, work also begins on the costumes and sets for each performance. There is a wardrobe department with talented seamstresses who work diligently to make sure costumes are made and fit the dancers to perfection. Sets and backdrops are ordered or constructed and arrangements are made if “flying” a dancer is included in the show, like *Peter Pan*.

The week of a performance, A.V.A. Ballet Theatre moves the cast and crew into the Pioneer Center for the Performing Arts for rehearsals. The wardrobe department is set up in the back and all of the sets and backdrops are arranged on the stage.

The first night, there is a blocking rehearsal where all of the dancers, out of costume, become familiar with the stage and know where they will be dancing. The next two nights, there is a full dress rehearsal without the Reno Phil, but the rehearsal is completely conducted to recorded music. The final two nights of the full dress rehearsals are with the orchestra. The Artistic Director works closely with the Conductor to make sure the music and tempos are just right.

On opening night, there is a lot of excitement in the air. As the dancers dress in their costumes, they often sing to keep from getting too nervous. About a half hour before every performance, all dancers get on the stage and form a giant circle, holding hands. The Artistic Director thanks them for their hard work, and they squeeze their hands sending energy around the stage.

And then it's show time!

The orchestra begins playing the music, the curtain goes up, and the dancers express their art in a most beautiful way. The music, dance, costumes and sets make for an exciting experience that makes the audiences want to come back again and again.



About *The Nutcracker*

A.V.A. Ballet Theatre presents its annual production of the holiday classic, *The Nutcracker*, featuring choreography by Artistic Director, Alexander Van Alstyne. Mr. Van Alstyne has choreographed an exciting rendition of the popular holiday ballet, and the Reno Philharmonic Orchestra will perform Tchaikovsky's moving score conducted by Composer, Laura Jackson.

Story Synopsis

ACT I: It's Christmas Eve at the Stahlbaum's house. The living room is filled with Christmas decorations including a majestic Christmas tree. As the they prepare for their holiday festivities, the Stahlbaum's children, Fritz and Clara, wait eagerly for family and friends to arrive. When the guests arrive, the party picks up with dancing and celebration. A mysterious guest arrives, nearly frightening Fritz, but not Clara, as she knows it is her Godfather, Drosselmeyer, the magical and eccentric toymaker.

The celebration is interrupted when Drosselmeyer reveals to the children that he has brought them gifts. The girls receive china dolls and the boys, including Fritz, receive bugles. Clara is given the best gift of all, the Nutcracker. Fritz grows jealous, and snatches the Nutcracker from Clara. In the chaos of his teasing, Fritz accidentally breaks the Nutcracker, upsetting Clara.

Drosselmeyer comes to the rescue and fixes the Nutcracker with a handkerchief, and Clara places the Nutcracker next to the big clock in the living room.

The party grows late and the children become sleepy. Friends and family generously thank the Stahlbaum's for their hospitality before leaving. As the Stahlbaum's retire to bed, Clara checks on her Nutcracker one last time and falls asleep under the Christmas tree.



At the stroke of midnight, Clara awakens to a frightening scene. Out of nowhere, large mice, led by the Mouse King, begin to circle the room. Drosselmeyer appears and the mice flee. He commands the Christmas tree to grow to such an enormous size that the entire room opens up, and he changes her toy-size Nutcracker into a life-size Nutcracker. The mice reappear and a battle ensues. Clara's Nutcracker groups the soldier toys into battle formation and fights the mouse army.

The Nutcracker and the Mouse King fight, and the Mouse King traps the Nutcracker in the corner. Just as the Mouse King is about to overpower the Nutcracker, Clara makes a desperate move to save her Nutcracker from defeat. She throws her slipper at the Mouse King and hits him in the head, distracting him and giving the Nutcracker the chance to run him through with his sword. The mice army quickly carries away their King.



After the battle, the Nutcracker collapses, and Clara comes by his side and weeps. Drosselmeyer brings him back to life, and the Nutcracker is magically transformed into a human prince. The Nutcracker Prince thanks Clara and they embark on an enchanted journey through the Land of Snow. The stage turns into a winter wonderland, where the snowflakes turn into dancing maidens. The Snow Queen and King greet Clara, the Nutcracker, and Drosselmeyer. The Snow Queen wraps Clara in her scarf and sends them off to the Land of Sweets.

ACT II: After their magical journey through the Land of Snow, Clara, the Nutcracker, and Drosselmeyer arrive in the Land of Sweets. Upon their arrival, they are greeted by the Sugar Plum Fairy. The Nutcracker Prince reenacts how the fearless Clara helped win the battle with the Mouse King. The Sugar Plum Fairy is impressed with Clara's bravery and the Nutcracker's heroism, and arranges a lavish festival. They are guided to sit in thrones, and shortly thereafter, the dancing begins. Dancers from China, Spain, Arabia and Russia have come to perform for Clara and the Nutcracker Prince.



The Mirlitons dance and Mother Ginger opens her skirt and little gingerbread children come dancing out circling around her. After the Mirliton dance is over, the children and Mother Ginger leave the room. Soon after, the Dew Drop Fairy leads the beautiful Waltz of the Flowers. Clara and the Nutcracker Prince watch with amazement as the flowers dance in beautiful, mesmerizing patterns.

A handsome Cavalier enters the scene and escorts the Sugar Plum Fairy to the center of the room. They dance to the most recognizable song in the entire ballet. The captivating pair dance lighter than air. This beautiful dance completes Clara's most perfect evening.

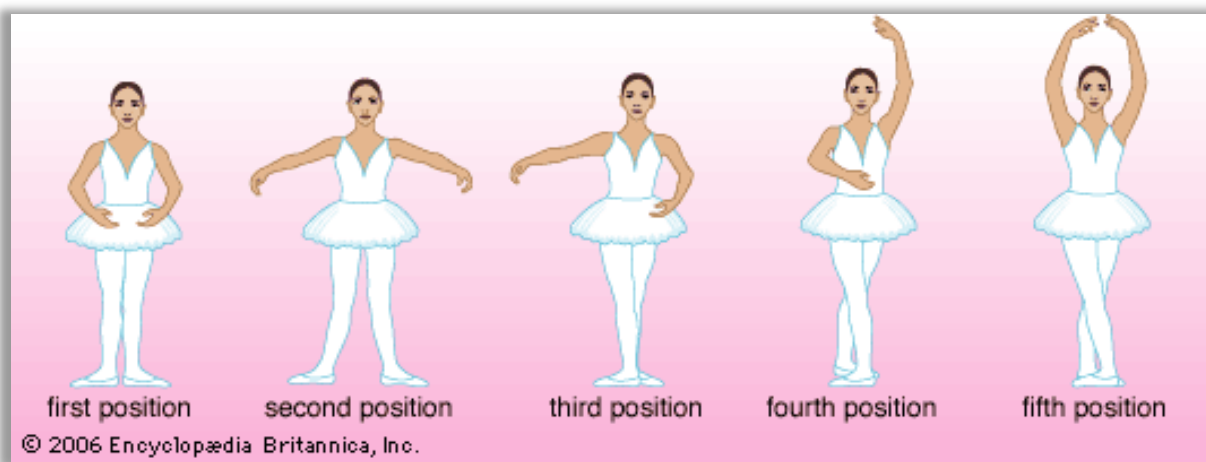
Finally, all the characters gather on the court, dance around in joy, and bid Clara and the Nutcracker Prince farewell.



Activities – Before the Performance

Basic Ballet Positions

These five basic positions are the foundations for all ballet moves. They will help you understand the positions that dancers move through. Each position has a shape for the arms and feet. Every ballet dancer starts with these five positions and masters them early on to be able to perform complex movements. If you master these moves, you will be on your way to becoming a ballet dancer!



For each of these movements, you must maintain good dancing posture – Stand up tall and straight, don't let your stomach hang out or your bottom stick out. Think of having a long neck and lift your chin slightly, as if you have glitter on your cheekbones.

Classroom Activity

Teach children the first five positions of ballet. Teach children as many or as few of these positions as they can learn. Play a game by calling out the number of a position and having the children achieve them.

FIRST POSITION	SECOND POSITION	THIRD POSITION	FOURTH POSITION	FIFTH POSITION
<u>Feet:</u> Touch your heels together and turn out your legs so that feet make a very wide V-shape. <u>Arms:</u> Make an oval in front of your chest, like you are hugging a beach ball.	<u>Feet:</u> Keep your legs turned out but slide your feet shoulder-width apart. <u>Arms:</u> Open the oval so that your elbows are in line with your shoulders.	<u>Feet:</u> Keep your legs turned out and touch one heel in front of the arch of the other foot. <u>Arms:</u> Keep one arm opened to the side and cross the other one in front of your chest, like first position.	<u>Feet:</u> From 3rd position, slide the front foot forward so they are still crossed with six inches of space between them. <u>Arms:</u> Keep one arm in front of your chest and lift the other one in a half oval above your head.	<u>Feet:</u> Put one foot turned out, directly in front of the other foot. The front toe touches the back heel, and the back heel touches the front toe. <u>Arms:</u> Make an oval above your head with both arms.

Exploring Movement and Descriptive Language

Create two lists of words by asking children to list movement and action words.

First List: Exploring Movement. Challenge students by asking questions such as, “What are different ways of walking? Jumping?” You can also show photos or videos of dancers or statues, and have them describe what they see. Examples:

Run	Walk	Tip Toe	Lunge	Float
Gallop	Skip	Hop	Balance	Bend
Jump	Leap	Twist	Push	Shake
Kick	Spin	Sway	Stretch	Swing
Rise	Fall	March	Fly	Wiggle
Roll	Crawl	Strut	Reach	Prance

Second List: Action Words. Depending student level, you may choose this list rather than brainstorm with students. Example dance concepts are listed below:

<i>SIZE</i>	Big, medium, small
<i>LEVEL</i>	High, middle, low
<i>DIRECTION</i>	Forward, backward, up, down
<i>PATHWAY</i>	Curved, straight, zig zag
<i>SPEED</i>	Fast, medium, slow
<i>WEIGHT</i>	Heavy, light

Create a space and have music ready (like Tchaikovsky’s *The Nutcracker* soundtrack). When the music is playing, ask students to dance movements called from the list, alternating between self (done in place) and general space (traveling). When the music stops, ask them to freeze. In the absence of music, you can use another cue such as a clapping rhythm, visual cue, or simply saying “freeze.” Once this is mastered, you can:

- ✱ Have students freeze in interesting shapes
- ✱ Have students add different levels to their shapes (high, middle, or low)
- ✱ Change directions of the movements (marching backwards, jumping sideways, etc)
- ✱ Change speeds of movements (jump fast, march slow, arms fast and legs slow, etc.)
- ✱ Add partners to movements and/or shapes (gallop together).

Remind students that dancers do these activities silently. This is a good way to prepare students for listening skills when at the theater, as well as giving them a chance to try different dance steps and movement.

After the Performance - Activity Pages

The Nutcracker Memories

NAME _____

AGE _____

Draw a picture of your favorite part of *The Nutcracker* ballet.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a child to draw their favorite part of the Nutcracker ballet.

Dear A.V.A. Ballet Theatre

After attending *The Nutcracker*, write a letter to A.V.A. Ballet Theatre. This letter can be to all of the characters or to your favorite character or dancer.

Dear _____,

My favorite part of *The Nutcracker* was _____

The Nutcracker made me feel _____

The part of *The Nutcracker* that surprised me was _____

Draw a picture of your favorite character from *The Nutcracker* ballet.

