



THE  
**HIP HOP**  
**NUTCRACKER**  
**STUDY GUIDE**



THE  
**NATIONAL THEATRE**  
FOUNDATION

# ***The Hip Hop Nutcracker***

The National Theatre  
December 20–22, 2024

Adapted by Mike Fitelson  
Based on *The Nutcracker* by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky  
Directed and Choreographed by Jennifer Weber  
Packet prepared by Dramaturg Leayne C. Dempsey

A holiday mash-up for the whole family, *The Hip Hop Nutcracker* comes to The National for the very first time. Directed and choreographed by Tony and Olivier Award-nominated Jennifer Weber, this contemporary dance spectacle is a re-mixed and re-imagined version of the classic, smashing hip hop dance and Tchaikovsky’s timeless music together into a heart-stirring and inspirational holiday event. *The Hip Hop Nutcracker* is brought to life by a powerhouse cast of a dozen all-star dancers, a DJ, a violinist, and MC Kurtis Blow, one of hip hop’s founding fathers, who opens the show with a short set.

Just like the original, in *The Hip Hop Nutcracker*, Maria-Clara and the Nutcracker Prince go on a dream adventure battling a gang of mice, visiting the land of sweets and learning the lessons of the holiday season. Innovative digital graffiti and visuals transform the landscape of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s beloved story from traditional 19th Century Germany to the vibrant, diverse sights and sounds of contemporary New York City.

Grab your family and friends and let the dynamic performers of *The Hip Hop Nutcracker* take you on a journey that celebrates love, community and the magic of the holiday season.



For almost 200 years, The National Theatre has occupied a prominent position on Pennsylvania Avenue—“America’s Main Street”—and played a central role in the cultural and civic life of Washington, DC. Located a stone’s throw from the White House and having the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site as its “front yard,” The National Theatre is a historic, cultural presence in our Nation’s Capital and the oldest continuously operating enterprise on Pennsylvania Avenue.

The non-profit National Theatre Foundation oversees the historic theatre and serves the DC community through three free outreach programs, *Saturday Morning Live! At The National*, *Community Stage Connections*, and *Teens Behind the Scenes*. These programs provide the greater Washington area with access to high quality performing arts experiences while promoting and employing local and regional artists.

THE NATIONAL THEATRE FOUNDATION  
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# KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

We are excited to welcome you to The National Theatre through our *Teens Behind the Scenes* program! Whether you're a new theatre-goer or a seasoned veteran, here are a few things to bear in mind.

## WHAT WILL I BE SEEING?

Over the course of its long history, The National Theatre has hosted many memorable productions. These days, the shows you are most likely to see here are Broadway tours. A Broadway tour grows out of a production that is currently running or recently ran on Broadway in New York City. The touring version uses the same script, musical score, choreography, and direction. The production elements, such as the sets and costumes, are largely the same, too, though many have been adapted so they can be transported across the country. The actors you see onstage are also traveling all over the country, often for a year or more at a time. In other words, the show you see in Washington, DC is the same show that folks in Baltimore, Philadelphia, or Atlanta might have just seen, too.

In addition to Broadway tours, you may also see the occasional pre-Broadway tryout. This is when producers debut a show in a major city outside of New York in order to test new or revised material in front of a paying audience. Oftentimes, the creative team adjusts the show based on audience reactions before moving on to New York, usually with much of the same cast and crew in tow.

## HOW CAN I MAXIMIZE MY EXPERIENCE?

Historically, audience members' behavior at the theatre has been guided, and sometimes constrained, by unspoken norms or "rules." Over time, certain norms like formal dress codes have gradually relaxed, allowing for a more inclusive environment. Rather than list other "rules," we want to share some considerations that will help you enjoy your time at The National..

- **Arrive early and look for the ushers.** This gives you time to grab refreshments and use the restroom. If you are late and the show has already started, you may have to wait to be seated. The ushers can direct you to your seat and answer any questions you have.
- **Respect the space and your fellow audience members.** Consume any food and drink you bring into the auditorium carefully. Keep the aisles and rows clear by putting your belongings under your seat. Be mindful of your neighbor's personal bubble and stand to let them pass if need be. Generally, avoid talking during a performance; if you must, keep it to a whisper or briefly share your thoughts during laughter or applause.
- **Take a break from your screen.** Cellphones and tablets shine brightly in the dark and their noises can distract from the experience. Be sure to silence your devices and put them away. An exception is a closed captioning app like GalaPro, which you can use on your device; you can also request a special device from the theatre.
- **Show your appreciation.** If you enjoyed that big musical number, applaud and cheer! If something shocks or surprises you, feel free to gasp! Laugh if the moment calls for it; nothing kills a comedy like a quiet auditorium. While courtesy is important, it shouldn't stop you from having a good time.

# GO BEHIND THE SCENES WITH OUR TBTS WEBINAR SERIES

The TBTS Webinar series is a collection of interviews with emerging and leading theatre professionals, each conducted by one of our TBTS Dramaturgs. The artists share their pathways into the profession, what their creative process entails, and what young artists like yourself can learn from their experience. Check out this summer's offerings, featuring the artistic director of one of America's leading regional theatres, a prolific actor and teacher, a Tony-nominated lighting designer, a New York-based stage manager, a composer and music director, and a professor and leading access specialist!




The National Theatre Foundation presents

**BEHIND THE SCENES OF MUSIC DIRECTION**  
featuring Kristin Stowell

Interviewed by Lindsey R. Barr  
in June 2024

KRISTIN STOWELL

LINDSEY R. BARR



The National Theatre Foundation presents

**BEHIND THE SCENES OF STAGE MANAGEMENT**  
featuring Maria De Barros

Interviewed by Lindsey R. Barr  
in June 2024

MARIA DE BARROS

LINDSEY R. BARR



The National Theatre Foundation presents

**BEHIND THE SCENES OF LIGHTING DESIGN**  
featuring Amith Chandrashaker

Interviewed by Leayne Dempsey  
in June 2024

AMITH CHANDRASHAKER

LEAYNE DEMPSEY



The National Theatre Foundation presents

**BEHIND THE SCENES OF DRAMATURGY**  
featuring Samuel Yates

Interviewed by Leayne Dempsey  
in July 2024

SAMUEL YATES

LEAYNE DEMPSEY



The National Theatre Foundation presents

**BEHIND THE SCENES OF ACTING**  
featuring Ro Boddie

Interviewed by Leayne Dempsey  
in July 2024

RO BODDIE

LEAYNE DEMPSEY



The National Theatre Foundation presents

**BEHIND THE SCENES OF ARTISTIC DIRECTION**  
featuring Hana S. Sharif

Interviewed by Lindsey R. Barr  
in August 2024

HANA S. SHARIF

LINDSEY R. BARR



# A LETTER FROM THE DRAMATURG

I was a mouse. Well, not literally, but every year as a child, I played one in our community's ballet production of *The Nutcracker*. Our dance studio partnered with a Ukrainian ballet company, and children were invited to portray mice and soldiers. It was one of my favorite moments of the year: performing in the show that everyone wanted to be in.

For many, *The Nutcracker* is a ballet. The light, airy movements paired with Tchaikovsky's iconic score make it a hallmark of the art form. The story of Clara, her magical Nutcracker, and the enchanting Land of Sweets seems tailor-made for the elegance of ballet. But what happens when this timeless tale steps out of its pointe shoes and into sneakers?

That's where *The Hip Hop Nutcracker* comes in. It's a retelling of one of our favorite holiday stories utilizing the five pillars of hip-hop: MCing, DJing, Breakdancing, Graffiti, and Knowledge. What you get is a familiar story told with a fresh, energetic, modern flair.

Fans of the original will still recognize those memorable moments: for example, the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy and the impressive Trepak, a Russian dance where the performers seem to defy gravity with their leaps and spins. In *The Hip Hop Nutcracker*, we see those moments reimaged through pop-locking, break beats, and the ever-cool presence of one of hip-hop's pioneers MC Kurtis Blow. To fully appreciate this reinvention and what you're witnessing on stage, it helps to know the origin of the tale.

The magical story of *The Nutcracker* originated from E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*. Hoffmann's story included darker elements that were not suitable for children, so author Alexandre Dumas adapted it for a younger audience, changing the main character's name from Marie to Clara. The ballet version, composed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and choreographed by Lev Ivanov, premiered in 1892 in Russia. The United States saw its own versions beginning with the 1944 choreography by William Christensen at the San Francisco Ballet, and the iconic New York City Ballet version that debuted in 1954, choreographed by George Balanchine. Balanchine's interpretation has become the iconic choreography of our time.

*The Hip Hop Nutcracker* carries this tradition forward. While the style and music have shifted, the heart of the story—the joy, magic, and togetherness of the holiday season—remains the same.

And although my days as a dancing mouse are over, it's exhilarating to watch a beloved story of mine retold over a sick beat.

*Leayne Dempsey, Dramaturg*



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