

STORIES OF NUTCRACKERS

By John F. Hall

In the foyer of my old house, on both sides of the front door, are two, 31-inch tall Nutcracker statues. They are made of wood, with the exception of their tall black furry bearskin headgear. The British Army introduced the bearskin headgear following the June, 1815 Battle of Waterloo. The headgear made the soldiers appear taller and more intimidating. Several weeks ago, my son, gave me two, five feet, 10-inch tall, Nutcrackers made of metal. He put them in my foyer, one by the left side of the piano bench, and the other one by the right side of the piano bench. They are early Christmas presents. My wife, Paula then placed next to each of the smaller Nutcracker statues.



According to German folklore, nutcrackers were given as keepsakes to bring luck to the family and to protect the home. The folklore claimed that the nutcracker represented strength and power, and that it watches over the family to keep evil spirits and danger away. I do not believe in folklore and I trust in God to help keep evil away from my door. The nutcracker originated from ancestral customs during the dessert part of the meal. Prior to the 1700's, they were in the shape of animals, birds, and people. After the 1700's, they were in the shape of kings and soldiers. It was Tchaikovsky's ballet "The Nutcracker Suite" of 1892, that people began to associate the nutcracker with Christmas. Also, the story of the Nutcracker is loosely based on E.T.A. Hoffman's fantasy story, "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King." That story is about a girl who befriends a nutcracker that comes to life on Christmas Eve, and wages a battle against the evil Mouse King. For over a century, the Nutcracker ballet has been a Holiday tradition. Clara, the young girl in the Nutcracker story, received the nutcracker doll at her parent's annual holiday party. She begins the adventure in a dream. She wears banana curls and ribbons in her hair, and she has on a white dress and petticoats. Clara has a mischievous younger brother named Fritz. The nutcracker doll comes to life on Christmas Eve. It battles the Mouse King and transforms into a prince who brings Clara to a magical land. The Nutcracker ballet is performed without words.



Jim Yerman wrote a poem called, "The Nutcracker...Sweet." These are his words: "In my 69 years, I have never seen the Nutcracker Suite...never experienced the ballet...never heard Tchaikovsky's entire score...that is...until yesterday. As I sat captivated by the music...by the dancing and the fact there were no words to any song...I had to wonder to myself...what in heaven's name has taken me so long! I watched the performance mesmerized...thanking God for creating people who can move in such a delicately beautiful way...while at the same time thanking whatever person or persons creating the ballet. As the music thundered through the air and the dancers floated off the floor...I was hit by the realization that...this is what our bodies were created for. Our legs were made

strong but elegant allowing us to leap up to the sky...our arms were created to be as grateful as wings making it appear that we can fly. When the God's created us non—dancers...they left not one part up to chance...our ears were created to hear the music...our eyes to enjoy the dance. As I watched the arabesques...the pirouettes...the magic happening on the floor...”.

“I thought how our months were meant to stay closed more often...so our eyes can see and our ears can listen...perhaps a little more. Which also made me wonder with our eyes closed...our eyes and ears open to the beauty on display...is it possible to hate at all...while attending the ballet. Perhaps the God's were subtly trying to tell us...conceivably...perchance the solution to some of life's problems...can be found within the dance. Perhaps that's why these dancers were created to be so nimble...so graceful on their feet...to simply remind us there is beauty and love in the world...as to make the Nutcracker sweet.”

The only improvement that I can suggest to Jim Yerman's poem, is not to use the plural of the word “God's”. There is only one God, and that fact is found in Genesis, Chapter 1, Verse 27: “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” The Nutcracker ballet is a dance without words. If it had words, I would suggest the words of a song written by Tia and Mark Sellers called, “I Hope You Dance.” These are their words: “I hope you never lose your sense of wonder, you get your fill to eat but always keep that hunger, may you never take one single breath for granted, God forbid love ever leave you empty handed, I hope you still feel small when you stand beside the ocean, whenever one door closes I hope one more opens, promise me that you'll give faith a fighting chance, and when you get the chance to sit it out or dance. I hope you dance...I hope you dance. I hope you never fear the mountains in the distance, never settle for the path of least resistance, livin' might mean takin' chances, but their worth takin', lovin' might be a mistake, but it's worth makin', don't let some Hell bent heart make you bitter, when you come place to sellin' out reconsider, give the heavens above more than just a passing glance, and when you get the chance to sit it out or dance. I hope you dance...I hope you dance...Time is a wheel in constant motion always rolling us along, tell me who wants to look on their years and wonder where those years have gone...”.

The annual Pennyrile Arts Council and Brooke Bailey Dance, will show the Nutcracker ballet the first weekend of December, 2023, at the Alhambra Theater in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. When my granddaughters, Andrea and Heather were children, they went to the Angel and Brooke Bailey Dance studio in Cadiz, Kentucky. They were in gymnastics and hip hop and other dances, but not ballet. My old memories take me back to the times that I would take them to dance and watch as they practiced. Amber Miller wrote a poem called, “The Nutcracker.” These are her words: “Clare received a Nutcracker doll, the most beautiful thing she ever saw. She woke from sleep in a surprise. Magic started to happen right before her eyes. Her Nutcracker was alive! He killed the rat king, who tried to hurt Clara and destroy everything. Then the Nutcracker and Clara dance in the snow. She was so happy to be with her hero. Next, they arrived in the land of sweets. The Sugar Plum Fairy is who they did meet. They ended the night back at Clara's house. Now,

Clara will never have to be alone. The four Nutcrackers in my foyer do not have a smile on their faces. The reason is that people, two hundred years ago, inculcated their everyday hardships into the dolls they created.

There is an old German folktale about how the Nutcracker came into being. The story goes that there was a farmer who offered a reward to anyone who could help him crack the walnuts that grew on his tree. A carpenter told him to saw the nut in half, while a soldier told him to shoot the nut. It was finally a puppet maker who came along with a beautiful puppet, made of wood and painted in bright colors, which had strong jaws that could be used to crack the walnut. The farmer rewarded him by giving him his own workshop.

Next to the small Nutcracker statue, holding up a wooden sword, by my living room door, on a short table, I put my Nativity scene. I purchased the Nativity in 1965, after Paula and I were married. The first-ever Nativity scene is attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi. He had been inspired by his visit to the Holy Land, where he had been show Jesus's traditional birthplace. Jack Zavada wrote a poem called, "The First Christmas." These are his words: "It would have gone unnoticed in that sleepy little town; a couple in a stable, cows and donkeys all around. A single candle flickered. In the orange glow of its flame, an anguished cry, a soothing touch. Things would never be the same. They shook their heads in wonder, for they could not understand, the puzzling dreams and omens, and the Spirit's stern command. So they rested there exhausted, husband, wife, and newborn son. History's greatest mystery had only just begun. And on a hillside outside town, rough men sat by a fire, startled from their gossip by a great angelic choir. They dropped their staffs, they gaped in awe. What was this wondrous thing? That angels would proclaim to them heaven's newborn king. The journeyed into Bethlehem. The Spirit led them down. He told them where to find him in the sleepy little town. They saw a tiny baby wiggling on the hay. They fell on their faces; there was nothing they could say. Tears trickled down their wind burned cheeks, their doubts had finally passed. The proof lay in a manger: Messiah, come at last!"

I also put a lighted Nativity on my front porch. It has a statue of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. They are on one of my porch swings, that sits on two large concrete blocks. The swing is covered with a white sheet of angel hair. There is a lighted star above the Nativity, and a lighted lamb on the porch floor. The Nativity is in front of my Living room window, I can look out the window and see the Nativity scene, in the day or at night. My small Nativity in the foyer was made in Italy. It has Joseph, Mary, the baby Jesus, two shepherds, an angel, a donkey a cow, the three Wise men, several sheep, and a shepherd with a bagpipe. As I end this story about Nutcrackers, I remind my readers to keep Christ in Christmas. Nutcracker stories are just folklore, but Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. John 14:6

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