

signum
CLASSICS

The Nutcracker and I,

by Alexandra Dariescu

Alexandra Dariescu *Piano*

Lindsey Russell *Narrator*

Story by Jessica Duchen



THE NUTCRACKER AND I, BY ALEXANDRA DARIESCU MUSIC FROM PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY'S THE NUTCRACKER

1	Scene	arr Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky	[5.07]
2	Miniature Overture	arr Stepan Esipoff	[3.04]
3	Opening Act One	arr Gavin Sutherland	[3.14]
4	March	arr Mikhail Pletnev	[1.59]
5	The Battle / Pas de Deux in the Snow	arr Gavin Sutherland / Mikhail Pletnev	[8.02]
6	Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy	arr Mikhail Pletnev	[2.35]
7	Tarantella	arr Mikhail Pletnev	[1.35]
8	Arabian Dance	arr Stepan Esipoff	[3.55]
9	Russian Dance (Trepak)	arr Mikhail Pletnev	[1.51]
10	Chinese Dance	arr Mikhail Pletnev	[1.30]
11	Dance of the Reed Flutes	arr Stepan Esipoff	[2.28]
12	Pas de Deux	arr Mikhail Pletnev	[6.02]
13	Waltz of the Flowers	arr Percy Grainger	[7.29]
14	Finale Act Two	arr Gavin Sutherland	[3.58]

Total timings: [52.50]

ALEXANDRA DARIESCU PIANO
LINDSEY RUSSELL NARRATOR
JESSICA DUCHEN STORY

www.signumrecords.com

THE NUTCRACKER AND I, BY ALEXANDRA DARIESCU

1 In a land far away, a very long time ago, there lived a little girl who had a big dream. She wanted to become a pianist. Every time she heard the piano, its music seemed full of fairytales. There were rainbows and gingerbread, strings of pearls and enchanted forests where she could wander and lose herself while she listened. She wanted to be the person playing that music. She wanted it with all her heart and soul.

But perhaps it wasn't so long ago – because that little girl was me.

In the house where I lived with my mother and father, a little brown piano stood by the living room wall – and when Mama sat down to play it, all manner of magical colours and pictures and stories would come tumbling out. I longed to make it sing and speak as she did, but the dream seemed so far away that it looked impossible.



[2] It was Christmas Eve. We had a Christmas tree that smelled of fresh wood and pine forests, decked with cinnamon-scented candles and glimmering tinsel, and all our friends and family were coming over for a party. Guest after guest arrived, shaking the snow off their coats, wrapping us in hugs and putting down big bright parcels under the tree. They told me I could open my presents – so, in a flurry of ribbons and green and red wrapping paper, I set to work.

[3] What's that, peeping out from under the piano lid? Another parcel? What a funny place for it.

"I wanna," said my little cousin, Fritz.

"It's for me." I pointed at my name on its label, but he kept tugging the paper as I unwrapped it. Inside, there was a long red box, and inside the box was...

A doll? A very odd-looking doll. A wooden soldier, with a peculiar, long head. When I picked him up, his jaw dropped, showing two rows of white-painted teeth.



"It's a nutcracker," Papa said. "You put the nut in its shell into his mouth and press, and – crack! There's the nut for you to eat."

"I want a go," Fritz shouted. He grabbed the nutcracker from me and tried to run away, dodging between our surprised guests. A second later he had the nutcracker's feet in their painted black boots, I had his head and Fritz kept pulling, and...well, you can imagine what happened next.

"Silly-billy," Mama tutted, "breaking Clara's present!" She hugged me. "Don't cry. I'll fix the nutcracker."

She took the head and gently slotted it back into place. I popped a walnut between his teeth. Crunch! He was mended. And as the nutcracker's mouth opened again, I thought I heard a little voice say: "Thank you!"



[4] By the time the last guest went home, it was nearly midnight and the snow had settled into deep, soft layers on the pavements. I was too excited to sleep. I kept thinking about my poor Nutcracker. I knew Mama had fixed him. But what if he'd fallen apart again when I wasn't there?

I put on my slippers and slunk out into the silent living room, which was lit only by the full moon.

"Nutcracker? Where are you? Are you all right?"

"Yes, yes," came the same little voice. "Your Nutcracker Prince, at your service."

"Wait...did you just... speak to me? Prince? What prince?"

"Don't worry," said the Nutcracker, who was where I'd left him, on top of the piano.

"There's nothing to be afraid of."



[5] Just then, I noticed something moving in the darkest corner of the room. Oh no! A scurrying, slithering, scampering. Skittering claws on the floorboards. A stringy tail, twitching. And those eyes staring out, a cold red glare. There's only one thing worse than seeing a mouse, which is *not* seeing it – because you don't know where it's gone. And it had rodent friends. Several of them.

I got up on the piano stool, my knees trembling, and tried not to scream. This was no everyday mouse – it was a Mouse King. As I watched, it seemed to grow bigger and bigger. With that gaze it could petrify me. With that tail it could strangle me. With those teeth it could tear me apart.

In a flash the Nutcracker leapt down from the piano, brandishing his wooden sword. If the Mouse King was surprised, he didn't show it. He and his friends huddled together, glowering over their whiskers. Then, in a whirl of spiky fur, they were at war: one



Nutcracker against four huge mice, whirling his sword to fend them off. As I watched, he and the Mouse King locked together in combat, and the animal's sharp teeth were aiming straight at his throat. If I didn't stop being scared and do something right away, all would be lost.



Suddenly I knew what to do. I whipped off my left slipper and flung it at the Mouse King. It struck him between the ears. His paws dropped away from the Nutcracker and he fell flat on his back. His friends made a dash for the skirting board and disappeared. Everything was still.

Cautiously, I climbed down from the piano stool. I didn't want to kill the mouse – but I didn't want him in the house a moment longer. Shaking all over, I picked him up by the tail, dangled him to the door and flung him out into the snow.

When I went back inside...there, outlined against the moonlit window, was the figure of a young man – sitting on the floor, gazing at me.

I hesitated. Who was he? How had he got in? Where was the nutcracker?



“Clara, come back?” he said. “I need to thank you.”

“But – who are you?”

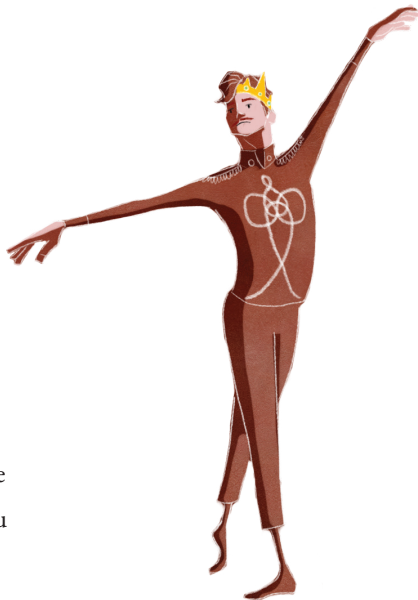
“I am, or I was, your Nutcracker,” he said.

“Come off it!” I laughed. “Who are you *really*?”

“Thing is, actually I’m a Prince. The Prince of the Land of Sweets. The Mouse King cast a spell on me and turned me into a nutcracker. You’ve rescued me.”

I was speechless with amazement.

“Even though you were so scared, you were brave enough to defeat him,” the Prince declared, “and you saved me!”



I went to help him up. As his palm closed around mine and he rose to his feet, I knew straight away that he was telling me the truth – and that I never, ever wanted to let go of his hand again.

“Let me take you to my palace and show you all its marvels,” he said. “Would you like that?”

“Yes, oh yes! But how?”

The Prince lifted me up in his arms. “We’ll fly,” he said.

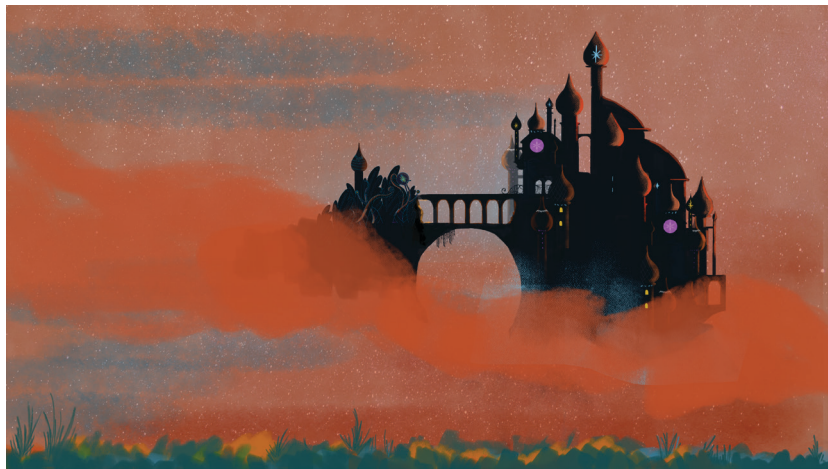
“What, in a plane?”

“No, no,” he laughed. “We’ll fly on the wings of music.”

And as I held on to his shoulders, I seemed to hear the ripple of a harp: then the window opened and we were rising into the winter air together, soaring far above the snow-clad town where the moonlight glistened back up at us, and the stars shone bright to show us the way.

As we flew I could glimpse a bulky shape far below. Descending, we saw towers, turrets, shining windows, a massive gateway and ramparts guarded by officials in crinkly uniforms that reminded me of sweet wrappers.

“Here we are,” the Prince said. “I can’t wait for my friends to meet you.”



[6] We dived through an open window to land with a bump on the tiled floor of the Palace’s great hall.

“Oof,” said the Prince. “Sorry about the touchdown! Where is everyone? Hello! I’m home!”

A sweet scent like fruit and caramel was drifting upon us – and a tiny, translucent figure half flew, half tumbled through the air, her dragonfly wings glinting in the moonlight. The Prince stretched out a hand: she landed in his palm. “My Sugar-Plum Fairy!” he cried.

“A fairy?” I echoed.

“The fairy,” he said. “She’s in charge here. She may look little, but my goodness, does she know how to run a palace! Dearest Sugar-Plum Fairy, meet wonderful Clara, who saved me from being a nutcracker.”

“Ha-ha-ha!” said the fairy, in her glittering voice. “Charmed! You’re so-so-so welcome

to our home. We've missed you too-too-too, dear Prince! What happened?"

"I'll tell you," said the Prince, "but first, won't you please show Clara your dance?"

And the Sugar-Plum Fairy was so thrilled to see the Prince that soon she was turning somersaults and looping the loop in mid-air, phosphorescent wings all aquiver.



7 By now the news had spread: more and more people were piling in to welcome the Prince home. He waved to his friends, shook hands with some, hugged others, and told his story again and again.

"The Mouse King turned me into a nutcracker. A kind person then gave me as a present to Clara – and she knocked out the Mouse King and broke the spell! I've brought her here to meet you all."

"How will you reward her?" asked the Sugar-Plum Fairy.

"You're right, Sugar-Plum Fairy, thank you for reminding me," the Prince said. "I know Clara has a dream. Let's see if we can help her with it."



8 “So now everyone knows you,” the Prince said to me.

“You come here to make your dreams come true,” the Sugar-Plum Fairy whispered in my ear. “What is it that you’re dreaming about?”

“I want to be a pianist,” I said. “And it would be so wonderful to find you all believe in me.”

“Tee-hee-hee,” she laughed. “And you believe in us! A modern girl believing in fairies!”

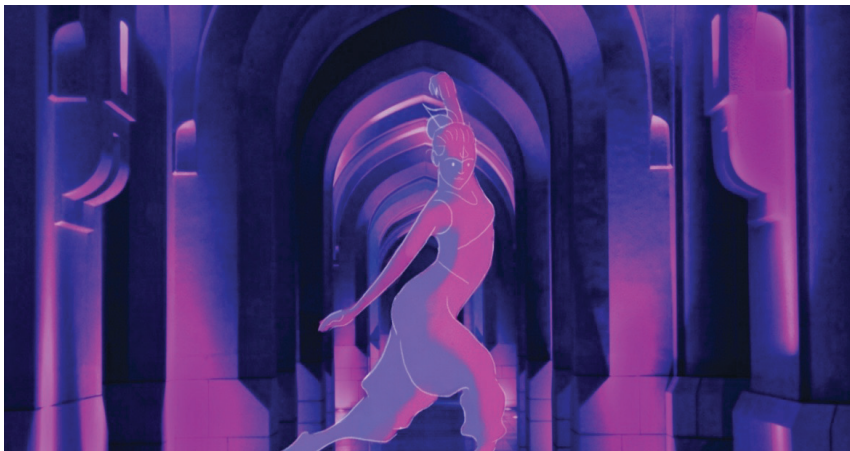
But the Prince stayed serious. “Believe all you like,” he said gently, “but you don’t play music through magic alone. You have to work at it, and more: you have to travel. You’ll need to feel at home everywhere, as you learn different kinds of music and how to play it, and you’ll see how the people in many other places live.”

“I’m ready to try,” I said.

“Then take my hand,” said the Prince, “and let’s begin.”

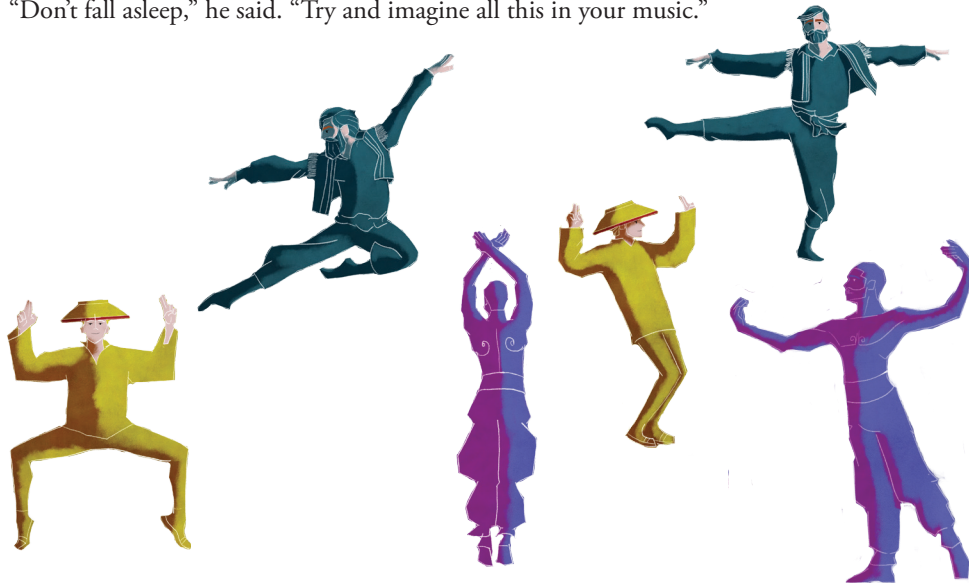
He led me towards an arched doorway, covered in ornate turquoise tiling and filigree metalwork.

“This is the Arabian Room,” he said.



As the door swung open, I felt sunshine on my skin and sand between my toes. A sound like the sea was the heavy fronds of palm branches swishing in the hot breeze. The Sugar-Plum Fairy fluttered into them and brought back a date for me to eat, sticky and very sweet, and as I started drowsing in the warmth, the Prince gave me a little cup of strong coffee.

“Don’t fall asleep,” he said. “Try and imagine all this in your music.”



9 As the next towering wooden door swung open, what a vision spread before us! To one side, a town skyline full of chunky tall buildings and white cathedrals with golden onion domes; to the other, a landscape that seemed to sweep on forever through forests of silver birch; and in front of us, two young men folding their arms, kicking out their heels and leaping around in the most extraordinary manner, each apparently trying to out-do the other.

“Why don’t you play the piano while they dance?”
said the Prince.



I went to the piano and joined in – and as the energy and brilliance of their dancing grabbed me I could feel my hands dancing too, on the piano keys, the music’s lively rhythms taking over us all, going faster and faster and faster and faster...

[10] The Prince led me towards a gateway covered in scarlet lacquer, patterned in gold with leaves and leaping fish. “I think you’ve earned yourself a nice cup of tea,” he said. And the gate swung open.

I looked around: there were tall, humpbacked mountains and snaking yellow rivers, shiny skyscrapers in gigantic cities – and everywhere I looked, there were children playing the piano, just like me! Nearby, in wide plantations where lavish dark green bushes had been cultivated, people in hats and overalls were working under the sun, picking the leaves.

“They’re collecting the best China tea,” the Prince said. “Let’s try some.”

That smoky-flavoured golden tea, after all my effort in the Trepak room, tasted quite glorious. Oh, how Papa would love it – if only he were there too.

[11] Ahh, that was good! “Come on,” said the Prince. “There’s a very important room next.”

We turned under a stone arch into which flying cupids, fruit-laden boughs, deer, dogs and people in elegant costumes had been carved in the finest detail. Broad windows overlooked a formal garden with tidy hedges, mosaic pathways, and purple, lilac and white blossoms growing in expertly landscaped groups. Oh, how Mama would love this, I thought.

Three girls in matching uniforms came up to meet us. Each was holding a silver flute.

“We are the Flute Trio,” said their leader, “and this is where we learn to play with polished technique. Won’t you join us?”



[12] “There,” said the Prince, holding my hands. “Now you know what you need to live your dream. You’ve seen other countries, you’ve made music with other people, you’ve understood you must work hard to polish your playing – and along the way, in case you hadn’t noticed, you’ve grown up! Now, can I ask you something?”

“Anything,” I said.

The Prince sank onto one knee. “Clara, I love you,” he said. “Please stay here with me, in my kingdom?”

I felt tears rising to my eyes. “I love you too,” I told him. “But how can I stay? I’ve loved every minute here, but I miss my family so much! I do love you – but I also love them...I want to go home, but I want to stay with you...Oh dear, I don’t know *what* to do!”

The Prince let me cry on his shoulder. “It’s all right,” he said, “I know how you feel. Just imagine how homesick I was, being a nutcracker all that time, when I only wanted to go home...”

And I knew he understood me completely.

“Come along,” he said. “I know how to cheer you up. We’re off to the concert hall – next, you’re going to give a concert.”

I gasped. “But am I ready?”

“Well,” he said, “there’s only one way to find out.”



I jumped onto the back of his bike. As we pedalled through the forest, I spotted the arching roof of the hall ahead. Inside it, we found rows of seats ranked around an expanse of wooden stage. In the middle stood a huge grand piano, open and waiting.

“Now you can play for us,” said the Prince. “Play for everyone who loves you and everyone who has helped you. Play for me, and your parents and all your friends. This is your dream coming true.”

And there I was, at home, because when my fingers touched those shining keys I knew the piano was my home.

[13] While I played, the magic tumbled through my fingers into the keyboard, and from there into the audience, its enchanted worlds blossoming out towards them. And all our spirits began to dance together in one great, whirling *Waltz of the Flowers*.

[14] The applause rang out, and as I bowed to the audience, overwhelmed, I noticed everyone was there – including Mama and Papa, their faces glowing with pride. Everybody cheered, and the Sugar Plum Fairy was flitting around in wild circuits,

magicking up garlands of countless little multicoloured lights and filling the air with the scents of sweet berries and chocolate. The Prince came up and kissed my hand.

“You see?” he said. “We believe in you – so now you can believe in yourself.”

I looked up into the lights, but still nothing in the concert hall was a quarter as bright as the eyes of my audience, my parents and my Prince. A flame of happiness lit in my heart and I felt its warmth spread through me, to the tips of my fingers and toes.

“Now will you stay?” asked the Prince. “Now that you’ve brought everyone together with your music?”

This time I didn’t hesitate. “Yes, oh yes! With you, my family and my friends around me, my impossible dream is becoming real – because I’m sharing it with all of you. I’ll work hard – and I will always *dare to dream*.”

Story by Jessica Duchon



ALEXANDRA DARIESCU

Alexandra Dariescu, recently named as ‘one of 30 pianists under 30 destined for a spectacular career’ (International Piano Magazine), dazzles audiences worldwide with her effortless musicality and captivating stage presence.

From the Royal Albert Hall in London to Concertgebouw in Amsterdam to Carnegie Hall in New York, Alexandra Dariescu won UK’s Women of the Future Award in the Arts and Culture category, Romania’s Woman of the Year, Romanian Radio award and she has released three solo CDs and two with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra to critical acclaim.

Alexandra Dariescu has performed extensively throughout Europe, USA, South Africa and Japan. Her current season marks more important milestones including debuts both at Vienna’s prestigious Musikverein (Grieg and Lipatti piano concertos) and Vienna Staatsoper (recital with Angela Gheorghiu), a tour throughout China as well as her concerto debuts in Canada and the US.

LINDSEY RUSSELL

One of the most popular and recognisable personalities on Children’s television, Lindsey Russell is best known for her participation in extreme challenges and physical trials. Her positive can-do attitude inspires and motivates children of all ages.

Lindsey is an Ambassador for children’s & animal charities. She regularly hosts live events, literary festivals and educational workshops.

JESSICA DUCHEN

Jessica Duchen is the author of five novels, two biographies, various stage works for musicians and actors and the libretto for Roxanna Panufnik’s opera *Silver Birch*. She was classical music correspondent for The Independent for 12 years. Her latest book is *Ghost Variations*, based on the true story of the Schumann Violin Concerto’s 1930s rediscovery.

Artistic Director & Producer – Alexandra Dariescu

Music recorded in All Saints’ Church, East Finchley, London, UK on 20th October 2017

Producer & Editor – Tim Oldham

Recording Engineer – Andrew Mellor

Narration recording and Post Production Engineering – James Waterhouse, Floating Earth

Artwork created by YeastCulture.org, illustrated by Adam Smith

Cover image – Dwayne Lewars, Hart D’Lacey

Photo – Andrew Mason

Hair and make up – Suki S Miles

Typesetting – Woven Design www.wovendesign.co.uk

© 2018 The copyright in this sound recording is owned by Signum Records Ltd

© 2018 The copyright in this CD booklet, notes and design is owned by Signum Records Ltd

Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording of Signum Compact Discs constitutes an infringement of copyright and will render the infringer liable to an action by law. Licences for public performances or broadcasting may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd. All rights reserved. No part of this booklet may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission from Signum Records Ltd.

SignumClassics, Signum Records Ltd., Suite 14, 21 Wadsworth Road, Perivale, Middx UB6 7JD, UK.

+44 (0) 20 8997 4000 E-mail: info@signumrecords.com

www.signumrecords.com

THE NUTCRACKER AND I,

BY ALEXANDRA DARIESCU

MUSIC FROM PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY'S
THE NUTCRACKER

1	Scene	arr Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky	[5.07]
2	Miniature Overture	arr Stepan Esipoff	[3.04]
3	Opening Act One	arr Gavin Sutherland	[3.14]
4	March	arr Mikhail Pletnev	[1.59]
5	The Battle / Pas de Deux in the Snow	arr Gavin Sutherland / Mikhail Pletnev	[8.02]
6	Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy	arr Mikhail Pletnev	[2.35]
7	Tarantella	arr Mikhail Pletnev	[1.35]
8	Arabian Dance	arr Stepan Esipoff	[3.55]
9	Russian Dance (Trepak)	arr Mikhail Pletnev	[1.51]
10	Chinese Dance	arr Mikhail Pletnev	[1.30]
11	Dance of the Reed Flutes	arr Stepan Esipoff	[2.28]
12	Pas de Deux	arr Mikhail Pletnev	[6.02]
13	Waltz of the Flowers	arr Percy Grainger	[7.29]
14	Finale Act Two	arr Gavin Sutherland	[3.58]

Total timings:

[52.50]

ALEXANDRA DARIESCU PIANO
LINDSEY RUSSELL NARRATOR
JESSICA DUCHEN STORY

