



# Tchaikovsky Sugar Plum Fairy



This month **Bridget Mermikides** travels to Russia to learn a charming piece by the legendary 19th century composer, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

## ABILITY RATING



**Moderate**

INFO	WILL IMPROVE YOUR
<b>KEY:</b> Em	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Finger and thumb muting
<b>TEMPO:</b> 104 bpm	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Classical technique
<b>CD:</b> TRACK 8	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Repertoire of classics

WELCOME to GT's classical guitar column, where we feature great tunes from an almost unbeatable repertoire. This issue we are looking at one of those classical pieces that is so familiar to such a wide range of people of all ages, that it's almost as if we're preprogrammed with it: Tchaikovsky's beautifully atmospheric Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy from his legendary Nutcracker Suite.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-93) is one of the best-loved, most important and influential composers of the Romantic era, having produced some of the most popular orchestral and ballet music of all time, including the 1812 Overture, his 6th Symphony, Swan Lake and The Sleeping Beauty.

Despite the considerable success of his music during his lifetime and indeed to the present day, Tchaikovsky suffered terribly with depression, feelings of worthlessness, intolerance of his homosexuality and an unhappy marriage. Some even believe that his death at age 53 may be attributed to suicide.

**“The harmony in this piece is really clever; it’s worth using the chords to expand your vocabulary”**

The Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy is from Act II of the magical Nutcracker ballet of 1892. It also appears in the Nutcracker Suite. Much of the dream-like atmosphere of this piece is derived from the use of pizzicato strings together with the celeste (also known as a celesta) - a tuned percussion instrument in which a mechanical keyboard strikes a series of metal resonating plates to create that mystical sound.

In fact the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy is one of the most famous uses of the instrument, and pretty much defined this evocative 'celestial' sound. Think of John Williams' delightful Harry Potter film score if you want to call to mind a more recent application.

Fortunately for us the classical guitar can be made to somewhat emulate both the plucking of the strings pizzicato style, and the magical resonating celeste.

The original key of E minor suits the guitar well, and although some parts have had to be edited for solo playing the essential musical elements are quite manageable with a little work - tab captions have been provided to guide you through some of the trickier sections.

The harmony in this piece is really clever and it's worth going through the chords and seeing if you can use them to expand your fretboard vocabulary and musical knowledge.

This is a fantastic piece to learn to add to your repertoire as it is so popular and recognisable, and if you take the time to get it under your fingers, it really is possible to recreate that wonderful magical atmosphere.

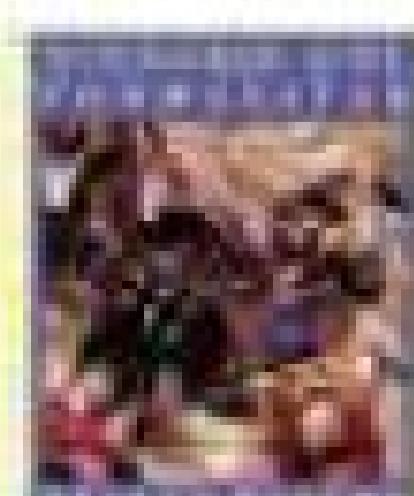


Tchaikovsky:  
depressive  
genius died  
aged just 53

## TECHNIQUE FOCUS

### FREE STROKE, REST STROKE

Two common picking techniques in classical guitar are free stroke and rest stroke. With rest stroke the picking finger plucks a string and then comes to rest against the adjacent one. With the thumb this is the next string down (towards the floor) and with fingers it's the next string up (towards the face). With free stroke the finger doesn't rest on an adjacent string after plucking, but floats free until it's required to pick again. Rest stroke is often favoured for single note playing, while free stroke is for polyphonic playing (chords and arpeggios).



**TRACK RECORD** Classical, jazz and world music guitarist Stevan Pasero's Nutcracker Suite For Guitar contains all the movements from this iconic piece, including not only Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy but also March Of The Wooden Soldiers, Russian Dance, Arabian Dance, Chinese Dance, Pas De Deux, Waltz Of The Flowers and more. If this month's track has whetted your appetite it's definitely worth a listen.

## PLAYING TIPS

CD TRACK 8

**[Bars 1-4]** Bass notes and chords should be played slightly staccato to mimic the orchestral strings, which have little sustain when plucked. The bass note should be plucked and then damped with the thumb just before the chord is played. The chord is damped with the three plucking fingers by sitting them securely back down onto the top three strings right before the next bass note is played.

**[Bars 5-10]** The melody is harmonised in 6ths and triads. Play the bass notes for their correct value; damping with the thumb on beats 1& and 2& whilst plucking the chords is an important part of capturing the spirit of this music. At bar 9 the slightly stretchy fingering is actually a better solution than a 1st fret barre as it enables guide fingers to slide up to the Adim chord in the next bar (bar 10).

The sheet music consists of five staves of musical notation for guitar, with each staff including a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature. The first four staves are in 3/4 time, while the fifth staff is in 2/4 time.

- Staff 1:** Shows chords Em, F#m7b5/E, Edim, Adim/E, Em, and F#m7b5/E. The guitar neck diagram below shows fingerings: 0, 2, 3, 4, 0, 2.
- Staff 2:** Shows chords Edim, Adim/E, Em, Adim/E, A#dim/E, and Fdim/E. The guitar neck diagram shows fingerings: 3, 4, 5, 2, 4, 5, 6, 3, 3, 3.
- Staff 3:** Shows chords A#dim/E, Adim/E, Em, F#m7b5, Em, N.C., C7/Bb, Am7, and D#dim. The guitar neck diagram shows fingerings: 2, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1, 0, 1, 0, 0, 2, 2, 0, 3, 2, 1, 0, 3, 1, 1.
- Staff 4:** Shows chords Adim, Em/G, F#b9, Bm/F#, F#7, B, C7, B, and N.C. The guitar neck diagram shows fingerings: 8, 7, 5, 3, 3, 3, 2, 2, 2, 0, 0, 0, 4, 2, 0, 2, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0, 3, 2.
- Staff 5:** Shows chords Em, Adim/E, A#dim/E, Fdim/E, A#dim/E, and Adim/E. The guitar neck diagram shows fingerings: 3, 5, 4, 2, 5, 6, 4, 4, 3, 3, 3, 2, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1.

## PLAYING TIPS

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[Bars 12-20] The 'hinge' barre achieves a smooth move from C7 back to the B chord on bar 12, beat 2. The C7 has no Bb in the original score but an A# and would correctly be called an Italian augmented 6th or 'It6'. There's no satisfactory way of labelling this as a 'real world' guitar chord, so 'C7' is a satisfactory

compromise. The shift into bar 18 from the downward legato scale needs a quick hand to land on the B note. The bass note B of bar 20 requires a firm pluck to sustain for the next bar and a half. The suggested fingering lets you hold the B for its full duration beneath the ascending upper notes.

Em F#m7b5 Em F#7/C# B/F# E7/B A/E

E B G D A E  
0 1 0 0 2 0 0 3 4 4 7 6 4 2 1 2 5 4 2

16

D7/A G/D B Em Em6/B B7 Em6/B B7/A

E B G D A E  
1 2 1 0 4 2 4 0 3 2 0 9 8 7 7 0 2 0 4 2 0 2 4 2 0

19

Em/B Em6/B B B/D# Em A7/C# D

E B G D A E  
3 0 2 4 0 2 0 5 0 2 4 1 2 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 4 2 0 4 4 4 4 4 2

22

Em6/B B7 Em6/B B7/A Em/B Em6/B B B/D# Em A7/C#

E B G D A E  
2 4 0 2 4 0 2 4 0 2 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 4 2 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 4 2 2 4 4 4 4 4 2

25

D Em6/B B7 Em6/B B7 Em6/B B7/A Em

E B G D A E  
0 4 4 4 4 4 4 2 2 0 4 2 0 2 0 4 2 4 4 4 4 4 2

28

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## PLAYING TIPS

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**[Bars 33 to 36]** These bars were the hardest to adapt for solo guitar in a way that would be realistically playable, given the physicality of the guitar when compared to that of a celeste. This passage is the celeste cadenza and it's very

magical sounding in the original. The notes in this arrangement have been halved in number and although they can't hope to sound quite as good as the celeste, the basic harmony still remains and is our best compromise.

The sheet music consists of five staves of musical notation for guitar, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The staves are numbered 31, 34, 36, 39, and 42 from top to bottom. Each staff includes a vertical column of numbers below the strings indicating specific fingerings. Chord names are printed above the staves at the beginning of each section:

- Staff 31: Em6/B, B7/A, Em/B, Am/C, Am/B, B, D7, B7/D#, D7, B7/D#, Fmaj7
- Staff 34: B7/F#, Fmaj7, B7/F#, Am7, B, Am7, B, D7
- Staff 36: B7/D#, D7, B7/D#, Em, Adim/E, A#dim/E, Fdim/E
- Staff 39: A#dim/E, Adim/E, Em, F#m7b5, Em, F#7/C#, B/F#
- Staff 42: E7/B, A/E, D7/A, G/D, B, Em