

## Discovering an Engraving Error in Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*

By John Stubbs

While working on some minor adjustments to my arrangement of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*, I became aware of an odd orchestration in *Le Thé*, or the Chinese variation. With the help of friends and colleagues from the San Diego Symphony I was able to discover a mistake in the orchestration which I believe is due to an oversight by the engraver of the original plates used in printing the score. I believe my article could be subtitled "Adventures in Amateur Musicology."

One of the scores I will be referring to is the Kalmus edition, which is a copy of the Broude Brothers edition, which is itself a copy of the original Jurgenson edition published in Tchaikovsky's time. A second score I used as a reference is a critical edition, I acquired from the reborn publishing house P. Jurgenson, published in 2006. In addition, I had the great fortune of my colleague, Igor Pandurski, discovering a link to a Russian website that hosts the original holographs of Tchaikovsky.<sup>1</sup>

I have been using my arrangement for over 25 years, conducting the San Diego Symphony for the California Ballet Company's production of *The Nutcracker*. Amy Taylor, playing the 2<sup>nd</sup> flute/piccolo part in the 2019 season, questioned the octave placement of the piccolo part in *Le Thé* (Chinese variation). She recalled playing the piccolo part an octave lower in previous performances. I checked all my scores. I confirmed that the octave placement was correct. But something in the original orchestration caught my eye.

In the Kalmus edition of the score, the "A" section is a repeated ascending scale with the first flute alone.



The "B" section has a repeated descending scale with the first flute joined by the piccolo.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.culture.ru/catalog/tchaikovsky/ru/item/archiv/shchelkunchik-balet-feeriy-a-v-2-h-deystviyah-3-h-kartinah-2017-08-17>

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system consists of two staves: the top staff is labeled 'Flute 1' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Piccolo'. Both staves contain identical musical notation, including a sixteenth-note scale with a slur and fingerings '6', '9', and '5'. The second system is identical to the first, also showing 'Flute 1' and 'Piccolo' parts.

When the “A” section returns, the first half is with first flute and piccolo. The second half of the phrase is with flute 1 and 2.

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system consists of two staves: the top staff is labeled 'Flute 1' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Piccolo'. Both staves contain identical musical notation, including a sixteenth-note scale with a slur and fingerings '7' and '5'. The second system consists of two staves: the top staff is labeled 'Flute 1' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Flute 2'. Both staves contain identical musical notation, including a sixteenth-note scale with a slur and fingerings '7' and '5'.

The coda has both flutes and piccolo playing till the end.

I felt there was something odd about having two different “colors” in the reprise of the “A” section. In the Kalmus edition, the first part of the “A” section reprise is on one page and the second part of the “A” section is on the following page. This was identical in the new Jurgenson edition. I

began to suspect that the necessity of this page layout could have contributed to a simple copyist mistake in cutting the original printing plates.<sup>2</sup>

In order to dig deeper into Amy's question, I went to the Russian site hosting the original holographs. Upon showing pictures of the original holographs to my colleague, Randall Brinton, he noticed numbers in pencil at the bottom of the pages that correspond to page numbers in the Kalmus score. And I noticed numbers on the individual staves and how they correspond to the choice of staves printed in the Kalmus score.<sup>3</sup> Randall and I discovered the mapping of the printing scheme by the engravers. This would not be news to serious scholars but for amateurs like us, the discovery was thrilling.

Upon studying the holograph, it appeared that Tchaikovsky had unambiguously placed both sections of the reprise of the "A" section in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> flute. When I approached Brett Langston of the Tchaikovsky Research website,<sup>4</sup> he had additional information about the holographs. Tchaikovsky premiered his *Nutcracker Suite* nine months before the premiere of the ballet. Because Tchaikovsky sent the movements that became the *Suite* to Jurgenson for publishing, the movements of the *Suite* within the full ballet score were authorized copies.<sup>5</sup> That information did not discourage me from thinking that Tchaikovsky's intention was to have the two flutes play the entire reprise of the "A" section and not split it up with piccolo/flute, followed by two flutes.

Looking at the holograph with new eyes, I could see a dramatic difference in the authorized copies of the *Suite* versus Tchaikovsky's notation of the rest of the ballet score, in his own hand. The most striking thing that I noticed was the neatness of bar lines in the authorized copies. While not quite ruler straight, they are noticeably straighter than the wavy bar lines in Tchaikovsky's hand. I believe this can show the care the copyist took while making a copy of the *Suite*. Another important difference is the placement of the piccolo part. In the authorized copies of the *Suite*, whenever there is a piccolo part, it is placed on the top line. Normally the piccolo part in a score is placed underneath Flute 1 and 2. There is even a note in Tchaikovsky's hand, in the three movements in the *Suite* that require piccolo, demanding the engravers place the piccolo in the third flute. Everywhere else in the ballet, Tchaikovsky places the piccolo on the third stave as per industry standard which makes me believe the piccolo placement was a quirk of the copyist.<sup>6</sup>

Ultimately, there was an answer that was in plain sight all along. From experience, I can guarantee that preparing for weeks of a *Nutcracker* run in December does not include comparing the score of the complete ballet to the score of the *Suite*. But that is what I decided to do. To my delight, the score of the *Suite* matches the holograph. Two flutes play the reprise of the "A" section. In addition, it is quite telling to compare the printing of the full score to the score of the *Suite*. The care taken in preparing the plates of the *Suite* is far superior to the plates used in the full score. Because of

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<sup>2</sup> This is a fascinating look at the engraving of metal plates for publishing music.

<https://musicprintinghistory.org/music-engraving-videos/>

<sup>3</sup> It is standard practice to show all instrumental staves used in a movement on the first page of a score, then print only the staves that contain notation in subsequent pages.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.tchaikovsky-research.net>

<sup>5</sup> Tchaikovsky's original copy of the *Suite* is now in the Tchaikovsky Museum Archive in Klin near Moscow, according to Brett Langston, and has not been digitized or published.

<sup>6</sup> Brett Langston pointed out to me that the copyist signed his name, Osipov, at the end of *Les Mirlitons*.

the page layout required for the printing, it doesn't surprise me that this mistake could have occurred without anyone noticing for over 100 years.