



Nutcracker

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off

Media type:

Book

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As a child I was banned from reading Hoffmann's **Nutcracker** because it gave my older brother such dreadful nightmares. Are the children of today made of sterner stuff? Will the death of Dame Mouserinks 'scrabbling in her own blood' raise a mere titter? Innocenti's illustrations in this heavy, large format gift book are not calculated to allay any fears; they are deep, dark and terrifyingly atmospheric. I found the story both curious and disturbing; a cracker of a period piece, but not the ideal introduction to the ballet of the same name. Is it, perhaps, the irresistible attraction of ballet to the pink satin slippered young that has prompted this edition? Much better to buy them **The Illustrated Book of Ballet Stories**, where they can not only read about Tchaikovsky's jolly rendering of the 'Nutcracker' but also find out all kinds of fascinating and informative facts about the world of ballet. You get real photos as well as pictures; not a literary tour de force, but bound to appeal to all aspiring to the tutu - and their name is legion.

Every Saturday morning halls are flooded with pirouetting little girls, but where are the little opera buffs clamouring to go to opera lessons? It could happen. If anyone can make opera stories attractive and accessible the wonderful Geras can - and there is an editorial touch of genius in the choice of the eight different illustrators (Ian Beck, Louise Brierley, Emma Chichester Clark, Susan Field, Katya Mikhailovsky, Sheila Moxley, Jane Ray and Sophie Windham). All the same, the emotional thrust of opera is in the music and the manner of the singing, not the plot line; are these stories good enough of themselves to justify such a beautifully crafted book? Suicide, murder, trickery, love and shooting foxes; are these themes that children regularly choose? Or are they justified because they are 'the stories of the opera', and therefore classifiable as 'educational'? I suspect grandparents and gift givers will rave, but children may not. Then again, they may beg to go to the real thing to see what it is all about, and they will arrive understanding the story of 'The Love for Three Oranges'. I never thought anyone would ever do that. Geras is a wonder

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