CELEBRATING

40 Years



2026

Nutcracker Cast Member

HANDBOOK

KEY INFORMATION

Key Contact Information

Studio Telephone Number
(480) 558-2080

Fee/Payment Contact
office@balletetudes.net

Fight Scene/Baby Mouse/Sweet Treat Contact
admin@balletetudes.net

General Questions
info@balletetudes.net

Tickets
www.balletetudes.net

Need to report an absence?
admin@balletetudes AND info@balletetudes.net

Key Event Dates

Sept 3 Deadline to accept role(s)
Sept 11-12 Studio rehearsals begin
Sept 26 Mandatory Parent/Guardian Meeting
Oct 9-10 No rehearsals (Fall break)
Nov 23-25 Chandler theater rehearsals
Nov 27-29, Dec 4-6 Chandler performances
Dec 4 Chandler School Show (Act 2 only)
Dec 9-11 Mesa theater rehearsals
Dec 12, 13, 19, 20 Mesa theater performances
Dec 20 Cast/Volunteer party

“IT’S MAGIC TIME!”



Sharon Seder Meko
Founding Director

Congratulations on being cast in The Nutcracker 2025! We are absolutely thrilled to welcome you to this year’s production and to celebrate this special milestone with you. Whether this is your very first Nutcracker or one of many, being part of this holiday tradition is something truly meaningful—and even more so as we mark our 39th annual production and continue Ballet Etudes’ 39-year legacy of excellence, artistry, and community.

Participating in The Nutcracker is a magical and rewarding experience, filled with memories that will last a lifetime. It is also a big commitment and a team effort. This packet has been thoughtfully prepared to help guide you through the entire process. Inside, you’ll find important information about rehearsals, expectations, costuming, performance week, and more. Please take time to review everything carefully, and don’t hesitate to reach out with any questions along the way.

We are so proud to have you as part of this incredible cast and can’t wait to share the stage with you during this unforgettable season. Welcome to The Nutcracker 2025—we’re so glad you’re here!

OUR NUTCRACKER HISTORY

Ballet Etudes' very first production of The Nutcracker was staged in 1987 at the Westwood High School auditorium. In 1991, we moved the production to the newly opened Chandler Center for the Arts, where we began presenting nine performances over two weekends—a schedule that remained consistent for many years. On special occasions, we were even fortunate enough to bring the magic to Prescott for a third weekend of performances.

Everything changed in 2005 with the opening of the Mesa Arts Center. That year, Ballet Etudes expanded its Nutcracker season to include an additional two weekends of performances—two at Chandler and two at Mesa. This four-weekend format has become our annual tradition and continues to this day.

Over the years, The Nutcracker has become a beloved holiday tradition across the Valley and is highly regarded by fellow arts organizations, ballet enthusiasts, and families who return year after year. During backstage tours, it's not uncommon for staff to be approached by multiple generations of audience members sharing stories of how The Nutcracker has become a part of their family's holiday celebrations.

It all began with a dedicated group of dancers and selfless volunteers back in 1987, who worked tirelessly to make that first production a success. Their passion and commitment paved the way for what Ballet Etudes has become today. Now, as we prepare for another magical season, we're so grateful to have you with us.

Welcome to The Nutcracker!



Photo: Our 1989 production of The Nutcracker

WE ARE A NON-PROFIT 501(C)3

Ballet Etudes is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization; there is no owner, but instead we are governed by an appointed Board of Directors. While other studios in the Valley have owners who reap profits, our studio has no such owner, but rather a supportive group of parents and friends who ask for nothing in return and believe in the mission of our studio and company.

PARENTS / GUARDIANS

As a parent or guardian of a Nutcracker cast member, your support is an essential part of your child's Nutcracker experience. Your encouragement, commitment, and presence make a meaningful impact—not only on your dancer's growth, but on the overall success of the production. We truly believe that the best experiences happen when families, students, and faculty work together with mutual respect and shared purpose.

Consistent attendance in rehearsals is vital during Nutcracker season. Each rehearsal plays a key role in building teamwork, discipline, and the confidence needed for a successful performance. When rehearsals are missed, dancers miss choreography changes and notes from the rehearsal director, as well as the benefit rehearsals bring to the dancer's sense of comfort and confidence in the role and with the choreography.

Thank you for being an active and valued part of this process. Your involvement helps create a nurturing, high-quality environment where every dancer can thrive.

VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS

Parents are required to complete a certain number of volunteer hours per dancer in order for their child to participate in Nutcracker. These requirements will be discussed at the parent meeting.

We recommend parents and guardians attend the parent meeting prepared with their fall schedule ahead of time so they can sign up for volunteer assignments during the parent meeting.

GENERAL

1. Cast T-Shirts

Nutcracker t-shirts will be available for purchase. We will notify you via the newsletter when they are on sale.

2. Performance Video Recordings

A professional videographer will record one performance from each cast, and these will be made available for purchase.

3. Tickets

Tickets are required to sit in the audience of The Nutcracker. Avoid scammers by always starting at www.balletetudes.net when making your purchase. Please note that Mesa Arts Center tends to sell out so we recommend you purchase those tickets early.

4. The Nutcracker Sweet Tea

The Nutcracker Sweet Tea is an annual Nutcracker event held at the Wright House Reception Center in Mesa prior to the start of Nutcracker shows. It always sells out early so if you'd like to attend, we recommend purchasing your tickets early. Visit www.balletetudes.net for more information.

5. Newsletters / Communication

Each week, we will send a Nutcracker newsletter to the email address you provided during audition registration. This newsletter will include the coming week's rehearsal schedules and other important information. If you don't receive it, please check your junk folder.

6. Parent Meeting

There will be a parent meeting where we will come together to review the information in this packet, and you will be able to ask questions as well as sign up for your volunteer slots. Please refer to the Key Information page of this handbook for the date of the meeting.

GENERAL

7. Cast Colors

Most roles are double-cast, which ensures that our youngest cast members are not required at all performances. This means that as we have 14 performances of The Nutcracker, the “Red” cast will perform 7 shows and the “Green” cast will perform 7 shows.

For example, there are two casts (8 dancers in each cast) for the role of Gingerette – the Red Cast and the Green Cast. One dancer from each of these two casts share the same “spot” and they are known as “alternates” for each other. Each cast will perform 7 performances as Gingerettes. However, there are other roles which have only one cast. This means one dancer will perform this role for all 14 performances. Typically, this role is held by an older dancer (typically age 13 and up**).**

8. Sunday Performances

As we have four performances on Sundays and two casts of dancers, one cast will perform two Sundays and the other cast will perform two Sundays. All dancers will perform at least two Sundays.

9. OPTIONAL Gift Exchange

After the final show, dancers sometimes hand out small gifts, candy, and/or cards to their cast members. This is in NO way mandatory and is purely optional. Please do not feel obligated to participate. We do ask that those choosing to participate keep the gift values low.

10. Cast Party

Following the final performance, a Cast Party will be held (time and location TBD). All cast members and volunteers are invited to attend to celebrate the end of another wonderful Nutcracker season!

GENERAL

11. Termination of Casting

In certain rare circumstances, when it is in the best interest of one or more students, the school director and/or board of directors may need to terminate a student's involvement in The Nutcracker. We always strive to address and resolve any problematic situation before considering termination. Reasons for termination of enrollment may include:

- Disruptive or dangerous behavior by students or their parents.
- Abuse of other children, staff, or property.

We want every student to have a positive and fulfilling dance journey. Rest assured, termination of enrollment is a last resort, and we will make every effort to resolve any challenges that may arise. Let's work together to create an uplifting and joyful dance experience for everyone involved!

12. Illness

The health and well-being of our students and staff are of utmost importance to us. We kindly request your cooperation in keeping our dance community healthy. If your child exhibits any of the following symptoms, we kindly ask that you keep them at home to prevent the spread of illness:

- Nasal discharge that is green or yellow
- Complaints of ear pain
- Consistent cough
- Severe sore throat
- Pink, burning, itching, or discharging eyes
- Diarrhea or vomiting
- Fever

If these symptoms or any other contagious conditions are observed in your child during a rehearsal or at the theater, we will promptly contact you to arrange for their immediate pick-up. When your child has a fever, please keep them at home until their temperature returns to normal. Furthermore, if there are any lingering signs of illness such as glassy or watery eyes, listlessness, or drowsiness, we kindly request that you keep your child at home.



IMPORTANT



If your child is unwell and unable to perform for their cast's show, contact us **ASAP** at both admin@balletetudes.net and info@balletetudes.net so that the staff has enough time to find another dancer to perform in their spot.

REHEARSALS

1. Studio Rehearsals

Rehearsals are held on Friday evenings or Saturday afternoons during the months of September – November. The day of your rehearsal depends upon your role and typically remains consistent. Dancers ages 7-11 typically have between 45 minutes or 2 hours of rehearsals each Friday or Saturday. Dancers ages 12-15 typically have 2 hours of rehearsal each Saturday. Note that these are typical and exceptions may apply.

2. Studio Rehearsal Schedule

Some roles will follow a set rehearsal schedule for the month, which will be shared prior to the first rehearsal. Other roles may have rehearsals with times that vary from week to week. In those cases, the updated schedule will be emailed each Sunday for the upcoming weekend's rehearsals.

3. Theater Rehearsals

Venue rehearsals will take place at Chandler Center for the Arts during the late/afternoon to evenings of the dates listed on Page 2. Dress rehearsals are MANDATORY for all dancers. Note that during these theater rehearsals, most cast members are not required each night.

4. Theater Rehearsal Schedule

This schedule will be distributed in October and will cover all four weeks of the theater including rehearsals and performances.

5. Downtime Entertainment

For long days at the theater or the studio, be sure to pack entertainment! Coloring books, card games, board games, and books are all great examples. However, please ensure any items taken to the studio or theater are not of value and are not disruptive (no sports equipment, loud gaming systems, etc).

REHEARSALS

6. Leotards

Dancers should wear black or colored leotards for all rehearsals except for Dress Rehearsals when nude/flesh leotard should be worn under costumes.

Dancers should avoid wearing a nude leotard in rehearsals at the studio and the theater.

7. Call Times

When we distribute the theater schedule in October, you will see “call times” listed. A call time is the time the dancer is required to arrive at the theater

8. Rehearsal Absences

Refer to the cast policy document in your email to review the number of absences allowed. To notify the staff of your dancer’s absence, please contact both admin@balletetudes.net and info@balletetudes.net

PERFORMANCES

1. End of Show Bows

The following roles are required to stay until the end of the show to appear for bows: Prince, Clara, Sugar Plum Fairy, Cavalier, Spanish, Arabian, Chinese Tea, Marzipan, Russian, Dew Drop Fairy, Garland Corps, Flower Corps. Certain Pages may be asked to stay to assist with on stage sets/flower bouquets.

2. Remaining at the Theater

On a day where we have two performances, any dancer performing in both shows is required to remain at the theater between shows. This is to ensure the dancer's safety. If your dancer will be at the theater for two shows in one day, please provide snacks and water or beverages for your dancer.

3. Green Room / Backstage Etiquette

To ensure a smooth and professional performance experience, all cast members must maintain quiet, respectful behavior in the green room and backstage areas. These spaces are shared by many, and it is essential to keep noise to a minimum, follow all instructions from staff and crew, and treat costumes, props, and personal belongings with care. Food and drinks (except water) are not permitted near costumes. Please remain in designated areas unless otherwise directed and always be performance-ready when called.

4. "Doctor's Bag"

At all rehearsals and performances, ensure you have your "doctor's bag" ready to go! A "doctor's bag" is what we refer to as having everything in your dancer's bag that you could possibly need for snacks/meals, hair and make up supplies, tights and backup tights, etc. it's better to be over-prepared at the theater than under-prepared!

5. Costumes

Ballet Etudes owns all of our Nutcracker costumes, and it is important for them to be treated with respect so that they can be worn for many more years. Dancers are responsible to properly hang up costumes. A fee will be assessed if costumes aren't cared for properly!

ROLE INFO

The following pages have been put together as helpful tools for you to know what to expect for the following roles:

- Party Girls
- Party Boys
- Baby Mice
- Fight Scene Dolls
- Fight Scene
- Sweet Treats
- Gingerettes

These pages don't cover ALL of our roles or the details for each role, but it does cover the majority of our larger groups and basic requirements so we hope you find it informative and helpful!

Additional details will be provided at a later date by the chaperone chairs.

PARTY GIRLS

Hair
Sharon will personally work with each party girl on their hairstyle

Clothing / Costume Pieces Provided by Dancer
Pink tights, nude/tan leotard, and a top and bottom cover-up. Tan leotards are considered undergarments, so a cover-up must be worn while outside of their dressing rooms. Clean pink ballet tech shoes. Also bring a colored leotard to be worn if necessary for last minute stage rehearsals.

Makeup
Party Girls are responsible for applying their own stage makeup. A guideline will be provided.

Dance Bag

- Clean Pink ballet shoes
- Spare pair(s) of pink tights
- Colored leotard to be worn over tan leotard if necessary
- Lots of extra bobby pins and safety pins
- Hair spray/gel
- Make-up removal wipes

PARTY BOYS

Hair
Side part and slicked to side

Clothing / Costume Pieces Provided by Dancer
White tights and black shorts (such as biker shorts) and a clean white shirt. They also need to be wearing top and bottom cover-ups so they do not get dirty backstage. Black ballet shoes.

Stage Makeup
Chaperones will escort the boys to the Make-up area to have their make-up applied. Note: While all make-up is provided by the studio, if you prefer to provide your child's personal make-up you must contact the Make-Up Cordinatior, this information will be passed out at the Parent Chaperone Meeting. * If you do provide your child's make-up, please label the product with your child's name on it.

Dance Bag
All boys need to have the following items in their dance bag:

- Black Ballet shoes
- Hair spray/gel
- Make-up removal wipe
- Card games, colored pencils, paper to color, books etc. for down time
- You may bring a blanket to sit on in dressing room

FIGHT SCENE DOLLS

Hair
Jaw line bun with center part

Clothing / Costume Pieces Provided by Dancer
Pink tights, nude/tan leotard, and a top and bottom cover-up. Tan leotards are considered undergarments, so a cover-up must be worn while outside of their dressing rooms. Bring clean pink ballet tech shoes. Also bring a black or colored leotard to be worn if necessary for last minute stage rehearsals.

Makeup
Chaperones will be applying all of the Dolls' make-up. Note: While all make-up is provided by the studio, if you prefer to provide your child's personal make-up you must contact the Make-Up Cordinatior, this information will be passed out at the Parent Chaperone Meeting. * If you do provide your child's make-up, please label the product with your child's name on it.

Dance Bag
All Dolls need to have the following items in their dance bag:

- Clean Pink ballet shoes
- Spare pair(s) of pink tights
- Colored leotard to be worn over tan leotard if necessary
- Lots of extra bobby pins and safety pins
- Hair spray/gel
- Make-up removal wipes
- Games, cards, colored pencils and paper, books or something that is not messy to do during down time
- Blankets to sit on in dressing room while not in costume
- Please don't bring anything of value or that you do not want any other children or staff to touch.

BABY MICE

Hair
Two braids crossed with center part. A tutorial will be provided at a later date

Clothing / Costume Pieces Provided by Dancer
Pink tights, nude leotard, and a top and bottom cover-up. Nude leotards are considered undergarments, so a cover-up must be worn by the dancer while outside of their dressing rooms. Regular pink ballet shoes should be worn during rehearsal. Grey shoes will be provided for the performances. If you wish to provide your own, you may do so, and we will paint them. Bring a black or colored leotard to be worn if necessary for last minute stage rehearsals

Makeup
Chaperones will be applying all of the Baby Mice make-up. Note: While all make-up is provided by the studio, if you prefer to provide your child's personal make-up you must contact the Make-Up Coordinator, this information will be passed out at the Parent Chaperone Meeting. * If you do provide your child's make-up, please label the product with your child's name on it.

Dance Bag
All Baby Mice need to have the following items in their dance bag:

- Spare pair(s) of pink tights
- Colored leotard to be worn over tan leotard if necessary
- Lots of Extra bobby pins and safety pins!!!!
- Hair spray/gel
- Any other necessary items
- Make up removing wishlist
- Games, cards, non-messy coloring items, books, etc.
- Blanket may be brought to sit on in dressing room while not in costume
- Please don’t bring anything of value or that you do not want any other children or staff to touch.

FIGHT SCENE

Hair

- Soldiers, jr. soldiers (high bun with center part)
- Cookies (high bun with center part)
- Jr. Mice (Gingerette hair with center part)

Clothing / Costume Pieces Provided by Dancer

Pink tights, nude leotard, and a top and bottom cover-up. Nude eotards are considered undergarments, so a cover-up must be worn by the dancer while outside of their dressing rooms. Soldiers, the Gingerbread Cookie, and Mice wear grey ballet shoes provided by Ballet Etudes. Bring clean pink ballet tech shoes and a black or colored leotard to be worn if necessary for last minute stage rehearsals

Makeup

- Jr. Mice have no make-up. Cookie's make-up is done by the make-up team and the makeup will be provided. Soldiers are responsible for applying their own stage make-up with the exception of the cheeks and are responsible for providing their own makeup. A guideline will be provided at the parent chaperone meeting.Note: If you prefer to provide your child's personal make-up you must contact the Make-Up Coordinator, this information will be passed out at the Parent Chaperone Meeting. * If you do provide your child's make-up, please label the product with your child's name on it.

Dance Bag

All dancers need to have the following items in their dance bag:

- Performance dance shoes
- Spare pair(s) of pink tights
- Colored leotard to be worn over tan leotard if necessary
- Lots of extra bobby pins and safety pins
- Hair spray/gel
- Make-up removal wipes
- Non-messy activities to keep busy during down time (No electronics)
- If you want, a blanket to sit on in room

SWEET TREATS

Hair
High bun with center part

Clothing / Costume Pieces Provided by Dancer
Pink tights, nude/tan leotard, and a top and bottom cover-up. Tan leotards are considered undergarments, so a cover-up must be worn while outside of their dressing rooms. Bring clean pink ballet tech shoes. Also bring a colored leotard to be worn if necessary for last minute stage rehearsals.

Makeup
Chaperones will be applying all of the Sweet Treats' make-up. Note: While all make-up is provided by the studio, if you prefer to provide your child's personal make-up you must contact the Make-Up Cordinatior, this information will be passed out at the Parent Chaperone Meeting. * If you do provide your child's make-up, please label the product with your child's name on it.

Dance Bag
- Clean Pink ballet shoes
- Spare pair(s) of pink tights
- Colored leotard to be worn over tan leotard if necessary
- Lots of extra bobby pins and safety pins
- Hair spray/gel
- Make-up removal wipes
- Games, cards, colored pencils and paper, books or something that is not messy to do during down time
- Blankets may be brought to sit on in dressing room while not in costume
- Please don't bring anything of value or that you do not want any other children or staff to touch.

GINGERETTES

Hair
Two braids crossed with center part. A tutorial will be provided at a later date

Clothing / Costume Pieces Provided by Dancer
Pink tights, nude/tan leotard, and a top and bottom cover-up. Tan leotards are considered undergarments so a cover-up must be worn while outside of their dressing rooms. Bring clean pink ballet tech shoes. Also, bring a colored leotard (to be worn if necessary for last minute stage rehearsals).

Hair
Chaperones will be applying all of the Gingerettes' make-up (with the exception of mascara). All make-up, other than mascara, WILL BE PROVIDED by the studio. Gingerettes will apply their own personal mascara after other make-up is applied. Note: While all make-up is provided by the studio, if you prefer to provide your child's personal make-up you must contact the Make-Up Cordinatior, this information will be passed out at the Parent Chaperone Meeting. * If you do provide your child's make-up, please label the product with your child's name on it.

Dance Bag
All Gingerettes need to have the following items in their dance bag:

- Clean Pink Ballet shoes
- Spare pair(s) of pink tights
- Colored leotard to be worn over tan leotard if necessary
- Personal mascara (labeled with name of dancer)
- Lots of Extra bobby pins and safety pins!!!!
- Hair spray/gel
- Make-up removal wipes
- Any other necessary items