



Sleeping Beauty
created especially for NYTB

Choreography by James Sutton
Music by Peter Tchaikovsky
Costume Design by Sylvia Taalsohn Nolan
Set Design by Gillian Bradshaw-Smith

The Sleeping Beauty to the music of Peter Tchaikovsky, the greatest of Russian composers, is one of the most spectacular achievements in the history of ballet.

Now, in an imaginative production conceived and choreographed by James Sutton for New York Theatre Ballet, this *Beauty* awakens into a new world of intimacy, buoyant dancing and innovative theatrical design.

In creating this monumental work for this celebrated chamber company, the setting of *Beauty* is re-envisioned in a tiny and magical fairy kingdom beneath the roots of a great tree with fanciful scenic designs by Gillian Bradshaw-Smith and sumptuous costumes by Sylvia Taalsohn Nolan.

Based on the original scenario devised by the great Russian choreographer Marius Petipa in 1890, a cast of fourteen dancers bring to life the enchanting story of Princess Aurora, bewitched by the evil Carabosse and placed along with her kingdom into a deep and protective sleep by the benevolent Lilac Fairy, to be awakened by her noble Prince whose kiss breaks the spell. In four swiftly moving scenes, the drama and excitement of this classic tale are enhanced by the fluid pacing and continuing development of characters.

Here is the entire story, told in all its brilliant elements, from the christening of the baby Princess Aurora to the glorious wedding celebration with her Prince, attended by fanciful storybook characters.

The famous classical tale of *Sleeping Beauty* was first performed as a ballet January 15, 1890 in St. Petersburg, Russia at the Maryinsky Theatre. *Sleeping Beauty* consists of court scenes, good and bad fairies, a beautiful princess, and a handsome prince.

In NYTB's production, *Sleeping Beauty* is a ballet with a prologue and three scenes:

The Prologue: The Curse (Princess Aurora's Christening)

Scene I: The Spell (Aurora's 16th Birthday)

Scene II: The Vision of Aurora and her Awakening

Scene III: The Wedding of Aurora and Prince Desiré

"New York Theatre Ballet has staged many types of productions. Among the most appealing are what could be called pint-sized ballets for tiny balletgoers...famous works...tailored to appeal to the attention spans of children."

NEW YORK TIMES

Cast of Characters

King Florestan XXIV

His Queen

Princess Aurora

Prince Desiré

Catalabutte (A Wizard)

Carabosse

The Lilac Fairy

The Footman (Puss 'n Boots)

Governess (The White Cat)

Their Son (The Wolf)

Their Daughter (Red Riding Hood)

Fairy of Strength

Fairy of Beauty

Faity of Brightness

Prologue: The Curse (Princess Aurora's Christening)

Once upon a time in a tiny imaginary kingdom nestled beneath a giant tree deep in the forest, King Florestan XXIV and his Queen prepare to celebrate the birth of their only child, a baby princess named Aurora. The Footman brings news of the guests to Catalabutte, a wizard and master of entertainment in the court. The guests for the christening are the sweetest four of the all the fairies: The Fairies of Strength, Brightness, and Beauty, along with the queen of the fairies, the radiant Lilac Fairy. The lovely Governess (on whom the Footman has a special crush) presents the baby Aurora, dressed in her christening gown, and the King and Queen take their places for the magical ceremony. The fairies dance their blessings and begin to offer their individual tributes when a fearsome storm stops the festivities. Carabosse, the Wicked Fairy, was not invited, and flies into the kingdom with vengeance on her mind. She, too, has a christening gift and curses the baby Aurora, declaring that the princess will grow to be a most beautiful young woman, but at her peak of youthful joy and glow, will prick her finger on a spindle and die! The court is horrified at their hopelessness, and inability to alter the awful plan when the Lilac Fairy reminds them that she still has a gift to bestow. Unable to cancel the curse completely, she alters it: Aurora will prick her finger, but will only fall into a deep sleep until a handsome prince awakens her with his kiss.

Scene I: The Spell (Aurora's 16th Birthday)

Sixteen years have passed, and the evil curse is forgotten. It is Aurora's birthday, and the Nurse and Footman, now married, dance with their two children in celebration; Catalabutte and the King and Queen join the dance in eager anticipation of Aurora's appearance. She arrives, more lovely than ever, and dances with playful abandon. As the court is lost in the happiness of the scene, a mysterious figure emerges with a gift for the sweet and unsuspecting Aurora. It is a spindle, an object completely unknown to her. She accepts it with enthusiasm, and dances with joy; before anyone can notice the unfolding horror, she pricks her finger, and finally falls to the ground unconscious. Carabosse reveals herself as the stranger, laughs in her triumph and explodes from the scene. All are left in grief and horror until the benevolent Lilac Fairy appears to remind them that Aurora is, after all, only in a deep sleep. She places a sleeping spell on the court and along with the other fairies covers the scene in a great bough of woods, shrouding and protecting the sleeping Aurora and her tiny kingdom.

Scene II: The Vision of Aurora and her Awakening

The fairies await the fulfillment of the prophecy. The melancholy Prince Desiré, handsome and brave, has wandered into the forest in search of solitude. He has everything but love, and his loneliness touches the spirit of the Lilac Fairy. She offers him a vision of the beautiful Aurora, and his heart leaps in anticipation. His longing is at an end, and with the gift of a magical sword to break the impenetrable wood that covers the kingdom, finds the sleeping Aurora and gently offers her a kiss. The spell is broken as Aurora and her kingdom awaken. She is filled with love at the sight of her Prince, and he is overwhelmed with her beauty. She introduces him to her father and mother, who bless the union.

Scene III: The Wedding of Aurora and Prince Desiré

The jubilant court dances in preparation for the joyous wedding ceremony. Catalabutte, the wizard, and the fairies conjure magical costumes which transform all the court into the mythical characters of their dreams. The King and Queen become the essence of precious Gold and Silver; the Footman and Governess are Puss 'n Boots and the White Cat, playful and loving; their young boy and girl become the Wolf and Little Red Riding Hood, challenging each other in the way of siblings; finally the fairies introduce the bride and groom as Aurora and her Noble Prince dance a Grand Pas de Deux, blooming with the grandeur of love. All celebrate the union as the succession is passed from the King and Queen to Aurora and her Prince. They will all live happily ever after.

Palaces, Politics, and Plies



Ballet can be traced back to 15th century Renaissance Italy when the study of classical literature became popular. The classical stories, consisting of symbolism and mythical creatures, were performed in the Italian royal houses and came to be called balli (from the Italian word for dance ballare).

Much like ballet productions in the 21st century, the balli spectacles of the past required a lot of time and money to produce.

Those included in the production were painters, set designers, costume designers, musicians, librettists, dancers, and dance masters. Despite all the energy and many hours the production team put into the making of a balli spectacle, it was often given only one performance.

In Renaissance Europe, the dancers consisted of courtiers (educated and wealthy people living in courts/ royal houses) who participated in the extravagant balli to publicly display their status and show their acknowledgement of the power of the prince or king. In order to win recognition and wealth in the royal house, one had to be as accomplished in dancing as he was in riding, fencing, and fine speech.

Balli traditions in the Italian royal houses also extended to the French court of King Louis XIV — an important figure (ruled France in the 1600s) in establishing ballet vocabulary as it is today. There were rumors that, when he was a young boy, he spent more time at his dancing lessons than his grammar lessons, because he loved to dance so much. Louis XIV built a magnificent palace in the city of Versailles that housed a thousand ambitious men and women and four thousand servants. Of course, everyone in Versailles longed to live in the palace with the king.

Historical Fact

In 1912, choreographer Serge Diaghilev recreated *Sleeping Beauty* for the Ballets Russes in London and called it *The Sleeping Princess*. They say Diaghilev changed the title because Lydia Lopoukhova (the first of his ballerinas to dance the role of Aurora), although a delightful and fascinating dancer, could not really be called a beauty. Therefore, Diaghilev took the word Beauty out of the title.

Original backdrop design for NYTB by Gillian Bradshaw-Smith.

The Creator

Marius Petipa (born 1819, died 1910) choreographed the original *Sleeping Beauty*. Petipa, dancer and choreographer of the Russian Imperial Ballet, was born in France and was known as the “Father of the Classical Ballet”; like King Louis XIV he was a very important figure in the evolution of ballet. Considered one of the greatest choreographers of all time, he created more than sixty evening-length works and countless short pieces during his fifty years working at the Imperial Theatre.

Marius Petipa’s Creation Process

The Russian Imperial Ballet was greatly successful under the direction of Petipa. The choreographer did research in the subject matter of the ballets he was staging before he began setting movements on the dancers. When he came into the rehearsal studio, he had prepared detailed plans for the composers and painters with whom he was working. Petipa always considered the movement more important than other artistic aspects, such as the set, music, and libretto. Sadly, in 1903 Petipa retired from the Russian Imperial Ballet because of the failure of his ballet, *The Magic Mirror*.

Personal Comment

James Sutton on the process of revising the classic:

“In developing a working scenario for a small-scale production of such a monumental work, my focus began not on that which needed to be eliminated, but instead on that which needed to be preserved. I have concentrated on the intimacy of the kingdom and the relationships of the central members of the court, both nobility and servants, with the theme of goodness and love triumphant as a motivating principle. The heart of any ‘Beauty’, despite its usual trappings of luxury and imperial manners, is the battle between good and evil, so powerfully expressed in Tchaikovsky’s immortal score and embodied in the characters of the benevolent Lilac Fairy and her evil counterpart, the wicked fairy Carabosse. I have kept true to the symmetry of this vision while re-imagining the setting in a fairy tale world both more intimate and fantastic. Using the original work as a model, I have devised new choreography throughout, yet I have maintained whenever possible Petipa’s choreography for the dancing of Aurora.”



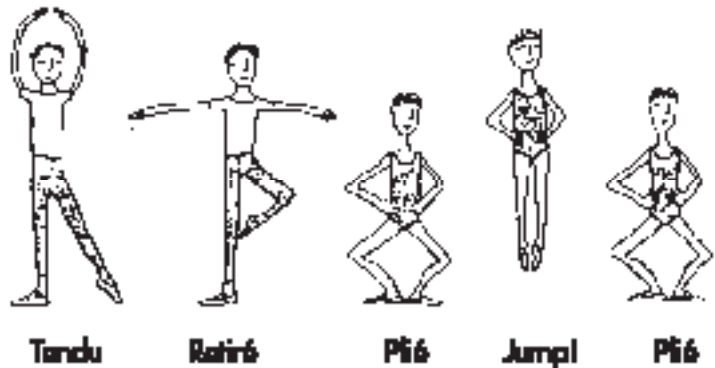
Try these ballet movements:

About the Performance

When you watch the ballet, use your eyes to see, your ears to listen, and your imagination to interpret the tale. The dancing, music, costumes, scenery, and lights all come together to tell the complete story.

Going to the ballet is not like watching a movie. The performers can actually hear you! So, sit back and be attentive to the action.

You may applaud if you see something you like, and discuss the story with your family, friends, and teachers afterwards.



Expression in Ballet - Mime

In ballet, dancers don't use words to express themselves. They use gestures to help tell a story. Using signs instead of words is called mime or pantomime. The art of mime in dance is very important because it not only helps communicate the tale, it shows what the characters are feeling. Dancers use their hands, fingers, arms, feet, head, and eyes to communicate. Some examples of mime include:

See - pointing to an eye

Hear - pointing to an ear or cupping their hands over the ear

Love - pointing to the heart or placing one's hand over their heart

Fear - leaning the body away with hands open and palms out

Think/Remember - touching or pointing to the one's temple

Try expressing yourself by saying thank you without words. Hold your hand out to the person you are thanking and drop your head. As you drop your head, bend your knees. Boys can place their feet in the shape of a small letter V with heels together, and gently relax the knees. Girls may put one leg behind the other and bend both knees. This is also called a curtsy.

Watch, Remember, and Describe

While you watch the ballet, identify the characters on stage.

- 1) What are their names?
- 2) What do they look like?
- 3) What are they wearing?
- 4) How do they move?
- 5) What are their roles in the story?

Pick your favorite character and focus on answering the five questions above about him or her. After the performance, describe this character to someone. Try to remember as many details as you can.

If it helps you to remember: Draw!

On paper, recreate a scene from the ballet with your favorite character. Think about the colors of your character's costume, the expression on his or her face, the set behind the character... Keep in mind what your character is doing in that scene. Were there other characters on stage?

New York Theatre Ballet was founded in 1978 by Diana Byer, Artistic Director.

Support for *Sleeping Beauty* is sponsored in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

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