

Sleeping Beauty

AUDIENCE GUIDE

About the Production

Welcome to Michael Pink's *Sleeping Beauty*, a magical story marked as one of the oldest and most famous classical ballets. Narrating a tale of romance and rescue, this production calls audiences to escape into the family-favorite fairy tale.

Michael Pink's version is deeply rooted in the traditional iteration set by Marius Petipa, further inspired by a contemporary environment that clearly defines the dark world of the evil fairy Carabosse and the light world of the good Lilac Fairy. Given that many retellings never reveal why the evil Queen/fairy/stepmother (role dependent on the version) is so malevolent, Pink emphasized the relationship between Carabosse and the Lilac Fairy to contextualize their actions in this ballet.

The History

The Sleeping Beauty was commissioned by Director of the Imperial Theatres Ivan Vsevolozhsky for choreographer Marius Petipa and composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky in 1888. Vsevolozhsky desired a French subject for this ballet and subsequently decided upon the Charles Perrault fairy tale *La Belle au bois dormant* (*Sleeping Beauty*). Other French elements included its setting during King Louis XIV's reign in Versailles and the inclusion other Perrault fairy tale characters, most famously the White Cat and the Bluebird. The story had already been adapted into a ballet for the Paris Opera in 1829, but it was this Franco-Russian version that would capture the imagination of the ballet world for the foreseeable future. The ballet was a massive success upon its premiere on January 15, 1890. Several numbers were encored, and Petipa was even called out to take a bow after the Garland Waltz in Act I. By the early 1900s, it was the second most popular ballet in the Imperial Ballet repertoire, and excerpts of it had been performed throughout the world. The first full-length western production was performed in 1921 at Alhambra Theatre in London under the title *The Sleeping Princess*. From then on, hundreds of variations and restagings have come into being everywhere that ballet is performed.

The Choreography

As a ballet-féerie, the original production followed the typical structure of a prologue followed by three acts. Petipa's choreography is notably more reminiscent of the then-emerging Classical Era than the fading Romantic Era, evidenced by the challenging pointe work done by Aurora and other female dancers.

Sleeping Beauty is considered one of the hardest ballets in the classical canon, with Act II's "Rose Adagio" acknowledged as one of the most difficult sequences for female dancers due to the amount of work en pointe. The wedding pas de deux between Aurora and Desire is also quite complex.

The Music

The Sleeping Beauty was the first collaboration between Petipa and Tchaikovsky. The now-iconic score was completed in 1889 as the second of Tchaikovsky's three ballets (the first being *Swan Lake* and the second being *The Nutcracker*) and, at nearly three hours when played in full, is his second-longest work in any genre.

Sleeping Beauty

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

The King and Queen celebrate the christening of their daughter, Princess Aurora. To mark the occasion, they invite five fairies to serve as her godmothers, each offering a special gift: grace, prosperity, song, and generosity. The most powerful of the fairies, the Lilac Fairy, bestows upon Aurora the gift of wisdom.

The malicious fairy Carabosse, enraged by being excluded from the celebration, curses the newborn princess. She decrees that Aurora will die before her sixteenth birthday after pricking her finger. Though the Lilac Fairy cannot reverse the curse, she assures the King and Queen Aurora will not die; instead, she will fall into a deep sleep for one hundred years, only to be awakened by the kiss of a Prince.

Eight years pass. Aurora has been kept in the safety of the castle, unaware of the curse that looms over her. The Queen is eager to keep the young princess entertained.

Upon Aurora's sixteenth birthday, four suitors arrive, each presenting her with a beautiful rose. A mysterious old woman arrives and offers Aurora a bouquet of flowers. Upon touching the bouquet, Aurora pricks her finger on a hidden needle, fulfilling Carabosse's curse.

As the Lilac Fairy had foreseen, Aurora does not die but goes into a deep, enchanted slumber. The Lilac Fairy casts a spell to put everyone in the kingdom to sleep alongside her, able to be awakened only when Aurora herself is saved.

ACT II

Prince Désiré, at a hunting party hosted by the Duchess, is invited to join in a game of blind man's bluff. He asks to be left alone as the hunting party departs.

The Lilac Fairy, who has kept watch over Aurora for one hundred years, appears before Prince Désiré, showing him a vision of the sleeping Aurora. She leads him through the forest of thorns to break the curse by defeating Carabosse and awakening Aurora with a loving kiss.

The King and Queen celebrate the marriage of the happy couple. All rejoice at the triumph of love over evil and the joy that lies ahead for Aurora and Désiré.



Sleeping Beauty

THE CHARACTERS



Princess Aurora

A princess born as a gift to the King and Queen from the Lilac Fairy. Her christening will bring her into the evil gaze of wicked fairy Carabosse.



Prince Désiré

Aurora's true love. Guided and Protected by the Lilac fairy, Prince Désiré is embarks on a journey to wake the Princess.



Carabosse

A wicked fairy that acts out of spite. She curses Princess Aurora to a 100-year slumber as revenge for not being invited to Aurora's christening.



Lilac Fairy

The principal godmother of Aurora and Prince Désiré. She works to bring balance and light in the lives of those she watches over.