

Matthew Bourne's Sleeping Beauty

Audio Description notes

Saturday 24th October 2015

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen and welcome to the Theatre Royal Plymouth for the much anticipated return of Matthew Bourne's glorious production of Sleeping Beauty, produced by his 'New Adventures' company – now celebrating its 28th birthday, and with his own inimitable style of choreography.

I am Veryan, your describer for the first two acts, with my colleague, Pauline describing acts three and four. The first half runs for 57 minutes. There will then be a twenty-minute interval followed by the second half, which runs for approximately 45 minutes.

I will now give you a brief summary followed by a description of the sets and scenery, the characters and costumes, followed by the cast list.

SLEEPING BEAUTY sees the choreographer, Matthew, return to the music of Tchaikovsky to complete the trio of the composer's ballet masterpieces, which started with his interpretation of 'Nutcracker' in 1992. This was followed by his international hit, 'Swan Lake' in 1995.

Perrault's timeless fairy tale, about a young girl cursed to sleep for one hundred years, was turned into a legendary ballet by Tchaikovsky and choreographer, Marius Petipa, in 1890. Bourne takes this date as his starting point setting the christening of the baby Aurora, the story's heroine, in the year of the ballets first performance; the height of the fin-de-Siècle period when fairies, vampires and decadent opulence fed the gothic imagination. As Aurora grows into a young woman, we move forwards in time to the more rigid, uptight Edwardian era; a mythical golden age of long summer afternoons, croquet on the lawn and new dance crazes. One hundred years later, awakening from her century long slumber, Aurora finds herself in the modern day, a world more mysterious and wonderful than any fairy story.

Matthew Bourne's haunting new scenario is a gothic fairy tale for all ages; the traditional tale of good vs. evil, where rebirth is turned upside-down, creating a supernatural love story across the decades that even the passage of time cannot hinder.

Act 1, called, 'The Baby Aurora', set in 1890 has the feel of classical ballet complete with fairy solos, while Act 11, called, 'Aurora Comes of Age', set in 1911, when the waltz was still king, introduces the suggestion of the new dance crazes coming from America.

THE SETS AND SCENERY

The stunning sets (and costumes) have been designed by Olivier Award winning, Les Brotherston.

Covering the front of the stage is a painted gauze depicting heavily swaged and draped baroque curtains. They cascade from a gothic pelmet to pool in opulent folds on the floor below. They are in shades of soft brown and cream tones with detailed tatting and intricately knotted fringes and tassels. Written across the curtain in blue gothic lettering are the words, 'Sleeping Beauty.'

During the production more writing will appear on the curtain – this will be read to you as it takes place.

Dominating the set, on either side of the stage stand pairs of towering polished brass Corinthian columns set on high square plinths. The ornate acanthus leaf capitols of the reeded pillars reach level with ornate buttresses that support deep cornices, one edging the top of the arch above the stage – the intricate detailing on the columns and overhead arches shines in the subdued light.

Between the columns are tall doorways surrounded by heavy gilt architraves, with equally large, empty gilded picture frames above. Beyond these, the sidewalls are composed of gilt edged, floor to ceiling mirrored panels. In some scenes similar glass paneled walls slide from either side across the back of the stage leaving a gap in the center. At other times, a sumptuous muted-gold, embossed curtain occupies the same space. This hangs floor to ceiling in thick folds finishing in a very deep beaded fringe at the hem and with a heavy swag of draped material on the left. This curtain is parted or occasionally partially scooped back on either side.

The floor is tiled in huge black squares edged in white with footlights like pairs of golden wings interspersed along the front edge, whilst crossing the rear of the stage is a raised travelator.

The lighting in baby Aurora's bedroom is subdued, coming mainly from an enormous full moon shining through the panes of glass in the back walls, and the hundreds of stars twinkling in the night sky visible through the opening between the walls. Either side hang the gold curtains and on the right stands Aurora's brass framed, muslin-canopied cot.

When the scene moves to the grown up Aurora's bedroom, the facing wall is decorated in a bold gold-flocked paper, a sash window in the centre and with the long gold curtains either side. Her ornate brass bed, covered by a red and gold cover, stands against the right wall.

In Act two the scene changes to a bright sunny summer's day in the palace gardens. An imposing, palladium palace stands on top of a steeply curving hill in the background – the grass is a brilliant green and the sky a vibrant blue. The formal gardens consist of a tall clipped hedge at the back on the right, along with a rose bed and a white bench in the middle. A large marble statue of a weeping angel leaning

against a high plinth stands in front of the hedge, while either side of the garden are pairs of conical trees, each with gold wings perched on top. Another bed of scarlet roses is on the left beside a white pierced-steel table and chairs. A picnic hamper along with a three-tire cake stand, laden with delicacies stands on the left, while another is placed on a rug spread on the ground along with a gramophone, complete with brass horn, in front of the statue. A white serpentine shaped bench is on the right.

The wonderfully atmospheric lighting is by Paule Constable.

CAST AND COSTUMES

Baby Aurora is an enchanting and very life-like Puppet dressed in a white gown and bonnet with white leggings.

King BENEDICT is tall and slim with sandy hair; beard and moustache reminiscent of the last Tsar of Russia We first see him in a floor length soft grey silk dressing gown. Later, for the garden party he wears a formal double-breasted cream summer suit with a naval peaked hat and brown shoes.

Queen ELEANOR first appears in a pale gold, floor sweeping negligee, the neckline and sleeves edged with deep ruffles and lace. Her hair is dressed on top of her head before falling in a plait over her shoulder. For the garden party, she is dressed, like all her guests, in a formal Edwardian style cream coloured gown complete with bustle.

PRINCESS Aurora, a delicate slip of a girl, is the daughter of King Benedict and Queen Eleanor. She is highly spirited with an abundance of blond hair tumbling over her shoulders. For most of the time she wears a white whalebone corset top tightly laced above a floaty white knee length skirt, and her feet are bare. When forced to dressed-up she wears a simple white dress with black embroidery around the hem and, most reluctantly, white high heeled boots, the mark of her progression into adulthood.

Leo, The youthful royal gamekeeper come gardener, wears a collarless shirt, brown corduroy breeches, knee-length gaiters, boots, braces and occasionally a tweed flat cap. He first arrives shouldering a gun and carrying a brace of dead rabbits.

Miss MADDOX, Aurora's nanny, is primly dressed in black bombazine with high neck, long sleeves and bustle.

The Fairies - there are six fairies, three male, three female. They are very gothic with white faces, eyes outlined, mask-like in black, and with dark red lips. They all have long black hair – the male fairies in ponytails, the girl's pulled back from their faces before hanging in loose tendrils down their backs. The male fairies are dressed in tightly fitting tail coats in muted dark red or blue silk, the bottom edge of their coats frayed in layers of different coloured tattered silk. They have exotic waistcoats and black cobwebby tights. The female fairies wear tightly laced pointed bodices with full, flowing knee length skirts, in similar colours to the men. Their skirts are also formed in layers of tattered silk overlaid by ribbons, which float and billow in the air as they dance. All the fairies have small white wings sprouting between their shoulder blades.

Count Lilac, king of the fairies, blue frock coat is embroidered with glittering silver threads and sequins that catch the light.

Carabosse The dark, vampire-like fairy, is very tall and imposing in a scarlet and black full-length Edwardian gown complete with bustle. The tight bodice and skirt trimmed in black. Her jet-black hair is pulled back from her dead white face. She has bright crimson lips and her eyes, encircled in black give a mask-like appearance. She has elongated, black spiky wings and carries a black rose.

Carabosse's two Vampire-like creatures or attendants are thickset, dog-like males. They are naked apart from the shaggy black fur that extends from waist to knees. Their heads are covered in long, matted black hair, their eyes masked in black, and, like their mistress, they also sprout black wings.

Caradoc, Carabosse's striking and powerfully built son, is incredibly good-looking, if somewhat sinister. He's dressed in Edwardian style, in black trousers, black shirt with a long white coat lined in dark red silk over the top. His long black hair is slicked back from his expressionless white face in a ponytail. He has heavy sideburns, and tucked into the lapel of his coat, is a black thorny-stemmed rose.

The Footmen, wear buff coloured knee britches with black tailcoats and waistcoats with brass buttons.

Flossie, Aurora's maid wears a black dress and starched white apron.

The Tennis players and guests at the garden party are dressed in cream flannels, shirts and jackets for the men, the girls in cream Edwardian dresses with hats and parasols. Princess Aurora's suitor's are dressed in cream frock coats, panama hats and brown shoes – One, **Lord Rupert**, has a moustache and carries a silver topped cane, while another, **Viscount Aubrey**, wears a pince-nez.

We will be describing the scene changes, arrival of characters and the action to keep you abreast of the progression of the story, but will only give minimal description of the actual dance moves as Tchaikovsky's score has been so beautifully enhanced into surround sound by Paul Groothuis, that I suspect it will be difficult to hear us during many of the sequences.

THE CAST

King Benedict - Will Bozier, Glen Graham, Chris Trenfield

Queen Eleanor - Pia Driver, Nicole Kabera, Katie Webb

Princess Aurora, their daughter - Cordelia Braithwaite, Kate Lyons, Ashley Shaw

Leo, the Royal Gamekeeper - Andrew Monaghan, Dominic North, Chris Trenfield

Count Lilac, King of the Fairies - Jack Jones, Christopher Marney, Liam Mower

Carabosse, the Dark Fairy - Tom Clark, Adam Maskell, Liam Mower

Caradoc, her son - Tom Clark, Adam Maskell, Liam Mower

Ardor, the Fairy of Passion, - Mari Kamata, Kate Lyons, Kate Webb

Hiberia, the Fairy of Rebirth - Cordelia Braithwaite, Katy Lowenhoff, Kate Lyons

Autumnus, the Fairy of Plenty - Jack Jones, Philip King, Leon Moran

Feral, the Fairy of Spirit - Dena Laque, Katrina Lyndon, Katie Webb

Tantrum, the Fairy of Temperament - Andrew Monaghan, Liam Mower, Dominic North

Lord Rupert, Suitor to Aurora - Will Bozier, Tom Clark, Dominic Lamb

Viscount Aubrey, another Suitor - Danny Collins, Glenn Graham, Adam Maskell

Miss Maddox, Aurora's Nanny - Nichole Kabera, Katy Lowenhoff, Katrina Lyndon

Flossie, Aurora's Maid - Pia Driver, Nicole Kabera, Dena Laque

Archie, Palace Footman - Danny Collins, Andrew Monaghan, Leon Moran

Bertie, Palace Footman - Jack Jones, Philip King, Dominic Lamb

ACT 3 AND 4 PROGRAMME NOTES

Welcome back ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls to Act three and four. My name is Pauline, your audio describer for these acts which will run for approximately 48 minutes.

The beautiful score is quite loud so I will endeavour to give you a synopsis of the scenes and characters but I will also keep you informed of the progression of the action as it takes place, without, I hope detracting from your enjoyment of the music.

The lavish baroque style curtain is in place with the words Sleeping Beauty in large blue baskerville font emblazoned across it.

The gothic fairy tale continues, the traditional tale is not as we know it but, nevertheless, it may have a happy ending. We left Aurora drifting off into a long deep sleep behind the locked gates of the palace and Leo being bitten by the King of the Fairies.

ACT 3: 2011

It is now 100 years later, the lavish curtain is the backdrop to the appearance of four young people, two girls and two boys dressed in modern outdoor clothes. The leader has a backpack and carries a map and torch and they are taking photographs of the gates, they are tourists visiting this legendary palace. They find the locked briar covered gates and strike silly poses in front of them and take photos of each other before leaving to find another tourist spot.

Leo emerges from a tent on the left in modern dress with a pair of white wings sprouting from his shoulder blades and a dark eye mask. He is frustrated he cannot open the gates and the King of the Fairies is behind the gates, watching him before he appears on the right dangling a key.

We are taken to the starlit magical misty forest of spindly trees lit by the stars, lamps on the tree trunks and an enormous full moon on the left. This is the land of the sleepwalkers where Aurora is trapped and they appear; the bare chested men are dressed in white pantaloons and the girls in pantaloons and corsets, they all have long dark hair. They are all blindfolded. The spirited dance style is inspired by Isadora Duncan. The King of the Fairies, Leo and a blindfolded Aurora are brought in on a flower strewn bed. She is passed around from Leo to two dancers and is eventually carried away out of his reach.

We are back in Aurora's bedroom and she is asleep, lying on her bed under a draped green coverlet . It is night time and the moon is shining through the large broken sash window and Caradoc is slumped at the foot of the bed. He is dressed in dark trousers, black shirt and a red waistcoat. He seems to be on guard. He tries desperately to wake Aurora but fails and waits for Leo to appear.

The gauze curtain will fall and the words' Last Night' can be seen across it before it is back lit to allow us into a lavish nightclub bathed in red light. The men and women are revelling here, a palatial evocative room with a wall of many rectangular sky high mirrors at the back with a central opening edged with purple strip lights. The corinthian columns frame the scene. Angel wing shaped mirrors are suspended at varying heights from the roof with blue neon lit strips in the centre of each. There are two buttoned black leather chaise longue placed at either side of the room .The costumes are predominately scarlet and black with both sexes wearing black masks. The ladies are in various styles of scarlet formal wear and they are wearing black elbow length gloves; they all wear high heels. Their costumes have wings embroidered on them as do the men and they wear scarlet jackets with black trousers or are in frocked red coats with waistcoats and black leggings. The mood is one of sensuality and a lively bordello where the participants are unfettered and their behaviour becomes sinister and macabre. Caradoc will be present, dressed lavishly in a red sequined knee length coat with a black waistcoat and trousers, his black feathery wings are discreetly embroidered on the back of his coat. The King of the Fairies and Leo will also appear, both are dressed in the same muted colours. Aurora moves among the revellers in a tattered white wedding dress and Caradoc dances with her before offering her as a sacrifice to his disciples.

ACT 4: YESTERDAY

Leo and the sleeping Aurora escape from the night club and he carries her away. They are in front of the swagged gold curtain. He awakens her with a kiss and they familiarise themselves with each other before dancing in a loving and emotional way, with undertones of sensuality. The curtain is parted to allow them to make their way to a bed placed in the centre of the rear of the forest and it is draped in a flowery coverlet with assorted lit lamps fastened to the bed head posts. The starry sky is a beautiful midnight blue and lighted lamps are set in the trees, leaves are falling all around them.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to a question and answer session with Michael Bourne, he said when he was in Moscow on tour, he was offered a private tour of Tchaikovsky's country retreat and this is where he had his inspiration to devise Sleeping Beauty. When asked if any Freudian or psychoanalytical influences came into play, he said the story is about growing up and rebirth and a young girl's journey into womanhood and the Prince having to prove his manhood. He started by reading all the versions of the story he could find and he took inspiration from each one, omitting Perrault's version where Aurora's resulting offspring were almost dinner for her ogre stepmother. He felt the music and choreography gave the piece its structure and it dictated the action, emotion, drama and character. He also said that the sleep could symbolise that lethargic time in a teenager's life when they don't want to engage with the world.

The next audio described performance will be the smallest Show on Earth on Thursday Nov 5th at 2.30pm