

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY

Full-length Ballet in Three Acts
Music by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikowski
Choreography by Marius Petipa

Libretto: Marius Petipa and Ivan Vsevolozhsky
after stories by Charles Perrault

Sets: Lev Solodovnikov
Costumes: Simon Virsaladze

Premiere: January 16, 1890 Marinski Theatre, St. Petersburg

PROLOGUE

ACT I

The Spell

--Intermission--

ACT II, Scene One

The Vision

ACT II, Scene Two

The Awakening

ACT III

The Wedding

PROGRAM NOTES

The Sleeping Beauty, a crowning jewel of Marius Petipa's career, is often considered the finest achievement of the Classical ballet. It is a grandiose and refined blending of the traditional mime, expressive pas d'action and spectacular divertissements in a lavish theatrical setting. Tchaikovsky was delighted with the invitation to write the music for a ballet based on Charles Perrault's well-known fairy tale. A baby princess, condemned at her christening by an evil fairy to prick her finger and die on her 16th birthday, is saved by the gift of the good Lilac Fairy, who declares the princess will only sleep until awakened by the kiss of a prince. The fairy tale, replete with a king and queen, fairies both good and evil, a beautiful princess and dream prince, magical stage effects, and courtly splendor, lent itself perfectly to the full evening ballet that was Petipa's pride.

Although different productions have cast the kingdom of King Florestan and his Queen in varying centuries, it is really a storybook kingdom set in the realm of the imagination. In the Prologue, the hall of the palace where the christening is about to take place is resplendent with color, and imposing with its high ceilings and great stone archways. The master of ceremonies, pages, heralds, ladies in waiting, and finally the King and Queen all promenade into the royal setting, looking most distinguished in their elaborate dress. Next, the fairies of the kingdom join the scene of courtly pageantry with the Lilac Fairy, six cavaliers and maids of honor entering

last. All dance in honor of the King and Queen and baby Aurora, about to be christened. Each of the fairies dances her own solo, presenting a gift to the Princess. Just as the Lilac Fairy finishes her dance a strange and frightening rumble is heard. Its meaning soon becomes clear: the master of ceremonies has forgotten to invite the evil Fairy Carabosse! The grotesque woman, her face a white mask, her long dress black and tattered, enters in a huge black coach drawn by four ugly rats. Stepping down, she gesticulates with her hand and threatens with her stick that they will have to pay the price for their omission. In mime, she delivers the ominous curse that the Princess will prick her finger on a spindle and die. The master of ceremonies is in disgrace, the King and Queen are in despair. But the Lilac Fairy has not given her the gift. She steps forward and assures the royal court that on her 16th Birthday the princess will indeed prick her finger, but then fall asleep for 100 years. Carabosse speeds off in a rage while the others surround the infant's cradle as if to protect her from further harm.

The Sleeping Beauty was the first of Petipa's classics to be seen in Western Europe. Under the title *The Sleeping Princess*, it was presented by Serge Diaghilev (1872-1929) in London in 1921. In 1939, it was remounted in Great Britain and has been considered the foundation of the Classical ballet repertory in that country ever since. It has now been adopted worldwide, and performance of the leading role remains a kind of initiation rite for aspiring ballerinas.

The Sleeping Beauty is a supreme demonstration of the challenge of Petipa's style - steel point work, sharply accented spinning turns, soaring leaps, high extensions, brilliant battery (beats in the air), daring lifts and, in addition, it gives a fairy tale plot lavish stage treatment. However, its production actually checked a growing tendency toward shapeless extravaganza in 19th century ballet, adhering closely to the principle of choreographic symphonism—like the composition of a symphony, it had a certain formal structure. *The Sleeping Beauty* was choreographed in strict association with Tchaikovsky's music. There are themes developed and resumed throughout the ballet, and each act is a unity unto itself. Tchaikovsky willingly took instruction from Petipa as to the length tempo and character of each musical sequence (as he would also do in *The Nutcracker*). The themes - a young girl's coming of age and the triumph of good over evil are developed dramatically and musically during the course of the ballet. Each of the three acts includes an Adagio for Princess Aurora, the first celebrating her girlhood, the second her falling in love, and the third her marriage. In these pas d'actions, Petipa makes fuller use than previous choreographers of the dramatic potential of the Classical ballet, as when Aurora's curved (questioning) attitudes become sharp (exclamatory) arabesques and her balances grow steadily surer.

PROLOGUE

King Florestan the XIVth declares a grand christening ceremony to be held in honor of the birth of his daughter, Princess Aurora named after the dawn. An entourage of six fairies are invited to the Christening to be godmothers to the child. They are the Candide Fairy, the Coulante Fairy, the Miettes Fairy, the Canari Fairy, the Violente Fairy and—most importantly—the Lilac Fairy, who is the last to arrive. As the fairies are happily granting gifts of honesty, grace, prosperity, song and generosity, they are suddenly interrupted by the arrival of the wicked fairy Carabosse, who is furious at the King's failure to invite her to the ceremony. The King and Queen begin to remonstrate, and the Master of Ceremonies, Catallabutte, intervenes to take responsibility, whereupon Carabosse rips off his wig, laughing. With spite and rage, Carabosse

declares her curse on Princess Aurora: she will prick her finger on her sixteenth birthday and die. But all is not lost: the Lilac Fairy, fortunately, has not yet granted her gift to the Princess. She acknowledges that Carabosse's power is immense and she cannot completely reverse the curse. However, she declares, though the Princess shall indeed prick her finger, she will not die, but instead sleep for 100 years until she is awakened by the kiss of a prince. Carabosse departs, and the curtain falls as the good fairies surround the cradle.

ACT I *The Spell*

Act I opens at Aurora's 16th birthday party. Brightly clad peasant girls dance a divertissement with flower garlands. Holding the arched garlands overhead, they dance in multiple circles, weaving in and out to a waltz tempo. All await the arrival of the Princess Aurora. The ballerina princess bursts onto the scene, dancing a brief and vivacious solo in the manner of a carefree young girl. She is then ceremoniously introduced to the four princes who have come to seek her hand. The *Rose Adagio*, the famous pas d'action expressing a young girl's blossoming into womanhood, is about to start. Aurora begins the adagio in with one leg raised and bent behind her, one curved arm raised overhead. Some have read in this "attitude" pose, which Aurora repeats often, a kind of gentle questioning or youthful uncertainty. One after the other, each of the suitors turns and displays her while she maintains her pose. She releases the hand of the suitor supporting her, and raising both of her arms overhead, balances momentarily, as if tentatively testing her abilities. She then takes the arm of the next prince and begins the sequence again. After a brief interlude in which the princess dances alone, she returns to accept a rose from each of the suitors (hence the title, *Rose Adagio*). She pirouettes slowly and accepts each rose; one prince supports her while the next offers his flower. At the end of the Adagio, she returns to her attitude position, and supported in turn by each prince, she again releases her hand and balances for a little longer each time. Finally, as she frees her hand from the clasp of the fourth prince, she again releases her hand and balances for a little longer each time. Finally as she frees her hand from the clasp of the fourth prince, the curved attitude straightens into a sharp, arabesque extension. She retains her balance poised confidently on one toe, as if she has visibly come of age before the eyes of the adoring suitors. The Princess continues dancing a joyful solo until her attention is suddenly distracted by a strange woman dressed in black who offers her an unfamiliar object. Before anyone can stop her, Aurora seizes the dreaded spindle. The unwary Princess pricks her finger, grows weaker, and falls to the floor in a swoon. Just as those assembled lapse into despair, the Lilac Fairy steps forward. Waving her wand soothingly, she reminds them that the Princess will only sleep and she casts everyone into deep slumber along with her. The Lilac Fairy summons a forest of thorns, thickets, and enormous shrubbery to grow around the sleeping court.

--Intermission--

ACT II

Scene One: The Vision

Act II takes us to a neighboring kingdom 100 years later. Prince Charming and his lord and lady friends are out for a hunt. The cheerful retinue amuse themselves with dances and games, but the Prince is tired of everyday diversions and stays behind to wander about alone. Suddenly the Lilac Fairy floats in on a boat with gossamer sails. She offers to show the melancholy Prince a vision of Aurora. The Prince is utterly enchanted by the sight of the Princess dancing lyrically and romantically amidst a tableau of fairies and nymphs, bathed in a bluish light. He pursues her but can only hold the Princess in his arms for a moment before she eludes him and disappears. She is after all only a spectral image conjured up by the Lilac Fairy. The Fairy offers to take the Prince across the lake, through the dense and tangled forest, to the castle where the real Princess lies asleep.

ACT II

Scene Two: The Awakening

The Prince approaches the canopied bed set on a high platform and, as the music heightens, he plants the awakening kiss. Aurora greets him. The King and Queen appear from either side of the stage and welcome the awakened Aurora and her Prince with joy.

ACT III

The Wedding

The final act ushers us into a sumptuous hall, graced with statuesque columns and a circular gold staircase crowned by a blue sky. It is here that the Royal wedding of Prince Charming and Princess Aurora will take place. A full series of celebratory divertissements is performed by the inhabitants of fairyland. Puss 'n Boots, Bluebeard and his wife, Goldilocks and a Bear, Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf all dance. A highlight is the pas de deux of the soaring Blue Bird and his Princess. First dancing together and then separately, they compete with each other spinning and fluttering in sparkling flight, sometimes jumping so high they seem virtually suspended in the air. The man's variation in particular, which features many beating jumps while he arches his body backwards and forward (*brises voles*) is one of the most famous and demanding in the international repertory. The Bluebird's Dance ends with the female lifted on the male's shoulder. The celebration then climaxes with the Grand Pas de Deux danced by the Prince and Princess. They are regal, formal and confident dancing together. Prince Charming supports his bride's pirouettes and displays her long extensions and secure balances. The Prince jumps and spins during his solo and the Princess spins on pointe with even surer mastery than she showed in the *Rose Adagio*. Finally, Aurora whirls into the Prince's arms and dives toward the floor; the Prince catches her around the waist and supports her in the famous inverted pose known as the fish dive. All join the bride and groom for a spirited mazarinka and the Lilac Fairy, standing in their midst, bestows her blessing on the happy couple.