

## By Grace Young

ARTS EDITOR

Boston Ballet's The Sleeping Beauty opened the Friday before spring break. The three-hour show is set in a sparkly pink fairytale world, where people dance to communicate, and everyone is merry except the evil fairy Carabosse. The company does an extraordinary job with Marius Petipa's 120-year old classical ballet. The dancing, costumes, and scenery were superb.

To really enjoy the performance, however, remind yourself that the story is a fairytale for children and draw on your inner child's tolerance for sugary sweet characters and clichéd love affairs.

Sleeping Beauty is one of the most fundamental classical ballets. It "represents the purity of academic classical ballet," says Boston Ballet Artistic Director Mikko Nissinen. It premiered in Russia in 1890, around the same time as Swan Lake and The Nutcracker, and is set to Peter Tchaikovsky's score. It became The Royal Ballet's signature work in the mid-1900s, until the Boston Ballet acquired the production in 1992 and 2005. This season, the company hired former Royal Ballet soloist and ballet mistress Hilary Cartwright as a guest coach for the production, so that they could ensure the present performance is true



The evil fairy Carabosse (Erica Cornejo) brings a cursed spindle to Princess Aurora.

to the history and original form of the ballet.

The opening scene, of baby Aurora's christening, is as much a theatrical production as it is a ballet. King and Queen Florestan use ballet-mime to beckon guests to dance. As the Queen cradles Princess Aurora, her enormous diamond necklace glistens in the stage light — she could be the character little girls dress up as when they rock baby dolls. Guests arrive in choreographed ensembles, but quickly settle at the sides of the stage to make room for the fairies who bestow their magical gifts on the Princess.

Each fairy performs a delightful solo, during which all eyes are upon her. The Songbird Fairy (Sylvia Deaton) makes sharp, giddy dégagés to a fluted melody. The Golden Vine Fairy (Dalay Parrondo) has the comical habit of waving her arms in a spastic manner to match the music. The Enchanted Garden Fairy, Crystal Fountain Fairy, and Woodland Glad Fairy similarly have unique movements, each to distinct melodies by Tchaikovsky, which define their gift to the infant Princess.

The fairies hardly rest. Their feet are in constant motion as they flutter across the stage in quick bourrées on pointe. Once in a while, a line of children carries gifts balanced on pillows into the party. The audience gawks at the adorable munchkins, but the fairies, somewhat awkwardly, never accept the

During the Prologue there was a problem with dancers' shoes squeaking too loudly. At times, the squeaks overpowered the soft flutes and harps in Tchaikovsky's melodies. Unfortunately the sound reminded me of the sound Barbie dolls make when you move their legs and arms; and to complete the distracting inference, the dancers, dressed in sparkly tutus and pastel Easter-egg colors, easily looked like Barbies.

The fairy Carabosse (Erica Cornejo) arrives unexpectedly to Princess Aurora's christening. Her flame-red curls and sweeping gestures convey her anger about not having received an invitation. King and Queen Florestan blame their attendant for the invitation mix-up in an attempt at politeness, but Carabosse is unforgiving. Also, she clearly didn't get the memo about wearing Easteregg colors. Her shimmering black robe provides sharp contrast with everyone else on stage. Her creatures perform a stunningly athletic routine to convey their malicious intentions. The four Boston Ballet Students in these roles performed excellently. Despite their masks and dark costumes, they almost stole the scene from Carabosse herself.

curse upon Princess Aurora. Fortunately, the Lilac Fairy (Lia Cirio) saves the day (in a sense), by promising that Aurora will not die when she pricks her finger, but that she will instead fall into a deep sleep, and will be awoken by a Prince's kiss after one hundred years have passed. With this new "curse," the party goes back to being merry. Pleased with herself, the Lilac Fairy's beaming smile reaches the back row.

The story then fast-forwards sixteen years. Princess Aurora (Misa Kuranaga) glides into the village where her parents are greeting townspeople. She is truly stunning. She is happy, doted on, and diverts the audience's attention away from her friends, members of the corps de ballet, who danced in somewhat lackluster ensembles before her arrival. Kuranaga plays Aurora exceptionally well, performing technically demanding choreography without ever seeming to lose her breath.

In Sleeping Beauty's world, you can tell whether someone is good or bad based on his or her outfit. Good people wear bedazzling pastels, while Carabosse and her evil companions wear dark blacks and greens. Aurora doesn't figure this out in time, however. She accepts a diamond-studded spindle from Carabosse that pricks her, fulfilling the curse.

Aurora wavers a bit after pricking her finger, but surprises everybody by leaping around the stage in full grand jeté with a child's energy. But soon she succumbs to the curse and collapses into her horrified parents' arms. The Lilac Fairy makes a grand entrance, as Aurora did at the beginning of the Act, instructs Aurora's suitors to carry her body to the tower, and closes the scene by putting all the townspeople to sleep.

Act II introduces Prince Desire and his hunting party. As soon as Desire (Jeffrey Cirio) appears on stage you know he and Aurora would make a picture-perfect couple. He's a petite Asian, young and full of child-like energy. He can't focus on the hunt because he's dreaming of love, conveyed through his elegant, sweeping movements. Like Aurora, he commands attention with his technical prowess and regal presence. His hunting party, composed of corps de ballet members and Boston Ballet students, perform, again in somewhat lackluster ensembles, while the Prince takes center stage.

Throughout the ballet, the ensembles at times strayed slightly off beat with the music, and there was some disconnect between the dancers and the live orchestra. However, the audience was distracted by the shim-To everyone's horror, Carabosse sets a mery costumes and dazzling sets, which

The Sleeping Beauty **Boston Ballet Company** March 22 – April 7, 2013 **Boston Opera House** 

more than made up for intermittent musical

The Lilac Fairy dazzles Act II as well. She leads lovesick Desire on a boat over rolling fog to Aurora's castle. They enter her bedroom, where not only Aurora, but also the King, Queen and townspeople slumber. The chemistry between Desire and Aurora is evident as soon as he sets eyes on her, even though she is comatose. Without missing a beat, Desire kisses Aurora, breaking the spell. Moments after waking up from her 100-year nap, Aurora accepts Desire's marriage proposal with her mother's encouragement.

Guests at Aurora's fairytale wedding include Puss in Boots, Little Red Riding Hood, and Beauty and the Beast, and they entertain other wedding guests with lighthearted dances. The audience especially liked the pas de deux of Puss in Boots and his partner the white cat — there was laughter as the dancing cats pawed and circled around each other.

When the Prince and Princess arrive, they once again steal the show. They perform together in choreography that echoes Aurora's routine with her suitors from one hundred years ago, but this time Aurora throws herself into Desire's arms. They finish their dance with incredible leaps, with Desire catching Aurora mid-air, showing their trust in one

It is hard to believe the same principal dancers performed All Kylian just a few weeks ago, which is an entirely different ballet. The amazing transformation is not just credit to the dancers, but also to the whole Boston Ballet crew. Sleeping Beauty included elaborate sets and costumes and demanded theatricality and near-perfect classical technique from the dancers, whereas All Kylian required more neo-classical technicality and daring artistry. The Boston Ballet dancers "have become chameleons of dance, able to adapt to any style with ease," wrote Nissinen. That fact shone sparkly pink and frighteningly black in this performance of Sleeping Beauty. The company's upcoming program includes another neo-classical ballet, Chroma, and another classical ballet, Coppélia, and to showcase the company's diverse talents even further.

## Ballet-mime: A sketch dictionary to help you decipher classical ballet moves

Ballet-mime is particularly important in Sleeping Beauty, as dancers frequently use it to convey narrative elements of the story.

## Key:

Meaning - character's action. Forget/Think - touches their forehead with their index finger.

Beautiful - makes a circle around their face with the palm of their hand.

Promise - points two fingers, held together, upwards in the audience's direction.

Princess - taps their forehead with their hand twice.



King/Queen - taps their forehead with their hand three times.



Anger - bends their arms, fists pointed towards the sky, and shakes them.



Fear – raises their arms and leans away from the object of their fear.



Die - crosses their arms in front of their body in a low position.



points to their ring finger.



Dance - raises their hands above their head, circling them and moving their arms from first to third position.

ILLUSTRATION BY PAULINA MUSTAFA