

"I always turn to Petipa over everything... People sometimes find me at a matinee of **The Sleeping Beauty**, which I have seen literally hundreds of times. And they ask me what I'm doing and I say 'having a private lesson'." – Frederick Ashton, c. 1960.

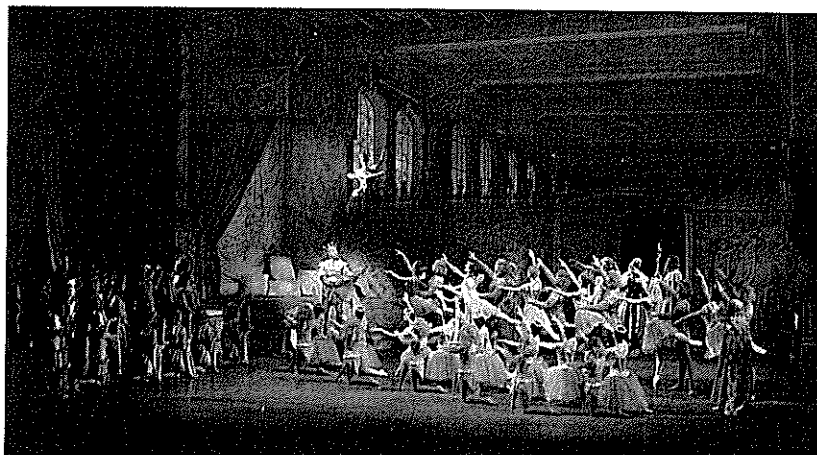
"**Sleeping Beauty** is pure diamond... Petipa's **Sleeping Beauty** is sheer genius" – George Balanchine, c. 1982.

"We (John Cranko and I) were immensely impressed with the choreography of the Petipa classic, and I knew that I had not seen anything so magical in my young life... Looking at my output as a choreographer, it might be hard to comprehend how much **The Sleeping Beauty** has meant to me... The Choreography of **The Sleeping Beauty** is as beautifully and formally laid out as the gardens of Versailles." – Kenneth MacMillan, 1989.

There are older ballets being performed today than *The Sleeping Beauty*. But, however powerfully they are sometimes realised onstage today, they belong to a bygone age. *La Sylphide*, *Giselle*, *Napoli*, *La Bayadere* all have many points of style which don't occur in today's ballets. They are, in different ways, wholly or partly "Romantic" ballets. *The Sleeping Beauty*, however, is thoroughly "classical". Though it comes to us from the remote Russia of the Tsars, it is made in a style firmly connected to the styles used by many choreographers today. Turned-out legs exposed from the upper thigh down. Torso and upper pelvis revealed by tight costume. Precise position of the limbs. Head, neck and shoulders rotating on the body's axis. Firm first arabesques, harmonious angles in attitudes, clear

varying levels of inspiration and stageability. Not so with *Beauty*, which he prepared with the help of the choreographer Marius Petipa, whose detailed requirements gave him a far more precise sense of the leaf and tree of a ballet's structure. As for Petipa, the score of *Beauty* seems to have inspired him to new peaks. This is the first ballet whose choreography is *about* its score, in the way that, say, Balanchine's twentieth-century plotless ballets have been. On one level, the purpose of this ballet is to help you hear its music better.

The story had been selected and turned into a stage scenario by Ivan Alexandrovitch Vzevolozhsky, the Director of the Imperial Theatres who brought Petipa and Tchaikovsky together. It was Petipa, however, who planned the details of the



The Sleeping Beauty (1968), Prologue. Design by Henry Bandon

Photo: Houston Rogers



Margot I

The Sleeping Beauty

– A hundred years of "Beauty"

Antoinette Sibley as Princess Aurora.



Photo: Anthony Crickmay

beats and turns. This is modern classical dancing, and *The Sleeping Beauty* makes it timeless.

This masterpiece, which has been an endless source of inspiration to twentieth-century choreographers, received its first performance a hundred years ago this January, at the Maryinsky Theatre in St Petersburg; and its composer Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky was born a hundred and fifty years ago this May. The ballet could not have been great without him. This was not his first ballet score. His *Swan Lake* had been first given in Moscow in 1877; but, in composing that, he had received little help from any choreographer – with the result that his music is of wildly

ballet's structure. You can see and hear now how he shaped the Prologue and all three acts so that each would reach its poetic peak in a great music-dance adagio (Fairy godmothers in the Prologue; Aurora in each of the three acts). Ballerina technique had evidently developed by 1890 to the stage at which supported adagio was a central component; supported adagio had not played so important a role in any older surviving ballet. Each adagio is followed by a pendant series of variations for individual dancers and by a coda for all concerned – so forming in all a suite of classical dances, or *grand pas classique*, which occurs at a different point in each act.

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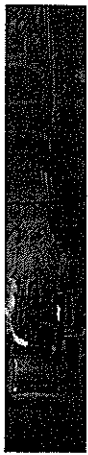


Photo: Houston Rogers



Margot Fonteyn as Princess Aurora.

"Should see." "Should be."
Unfortunately, you must often employ these cautious expressions when talking of *Beauty*, for no production you see today rivals the magnificence of the 1890 original. Balanchine, who in our century made so many great ballets with just a minimum of costuming and scenery, said, late in his life, "When they prepared the premiere of *Sleeping Beauty* at the Maryinsky, they spent fifty thousand rubles on the costumes alone — an enormous sum! And what stage effects and magical tricks! It was a grand *féerie*. *Sleeping Beauty* must be an extravagant spectacle." Balanchine had danced in the Maryinsky production as a small boy; and to him all subsequent stagings, Western or Soviet, were shabby.

This leads to the question of "Which version of *Beauty* is best?" There's no simple answer. If you've watched performances of this ballet presented by Western ballet companies since the War, there are two especially famous moments: Aurora's prolonged balances (in attitude, on pointe) in the Rose Adagio of Act One, and the spectacular "fish" dives she makes in her Prince's arms in Act Three's final grand pas de deux. Yet neither of these occurred in the original. (Margot Fonteyn has described how she developed the balances during the Forties. And the fish dives were introduced for *The Sleeping Princess*,

Photos: Courtesy of Royal Opera House Archives

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And, in each act save the last, there's then a dramatic climax in mime: Carabosse must deliver her curse, the court must be put to a century of sleep, the Prince must find the castle and kiss Aurora. In Act Three, however, the *grand pas classique* comes near the end, for it is the climax now of dance and of drama. By this point in *Beauty*, dance has indeed become drama.

Beauty is a cornucopia. No other ballet is so alive with the excitement of all the variety that ballet theatre could afford. At the end of Act One, as the Lilac Fairy wafts sleep over the court, you should see the greenery of the enchanted forest start to rise up the set. Towards the end of Act Two, as the Lilac Fairy takes the Prince to the castle in her boat, you should see her boat travel slowly in one direction while the scenery, in a great *panorama mobile*, travels the other way, showing you a long voyage through the sleeping wood. *Beauty* should be a ballet of theatrical magic.



Robert Helpmann as Carabosse.

Diaghilev's London staging of the ballet in 1921; his second-cast Aurora, Vera Trefilova, refused to do them, saying that so acrobatic a step was false to the ballet.) Or take something as apparently uncomplicated as the opening of Aurora in Act One – a legato zigzag of

of Act Three in the unusual 5/4 metre, but then did not choreograph it. Frederick Ashton, however, made a solo to this music in 1968, giving it to the "Fairy of Joy" in the Prologue. Since 1977 it has been danced where it belongs musically in Act Three, in Ashton's "Florestan and his two sisters" version of the Jewel

your mind. One of the problems that *Beauty* raises for us today is Act Three. The Wedding, whether danced by Western or Soviet companies, is normally a grievous anti-climax – an all-dance, no-story finale, tagged on after the real plot has finished with the Awakening kiss at the end of Act Two. Yet *Beauty* could never conclude with that Awakening. Academic dance is the mainstream of this ballet. We've seen how the fairy godmothers dance in the Prologue; and how Aurora inherits their steps, their floor patterns, their rhythms – but with greater complexity. The role of Aurora is virtually characterless. It can't be acted; it's a modern, "Just do the steps", role. (The trick is to do them fully, stylishly, musically.) After the hundred years' sleep in the middle of the ballet, when Aurora is woken, she dances with greater complexity than before. It's as if, in her music and her dancing, a dark shadow has passed across her world, leaving her less radiantly innocent, but more commanding, more refined and more varied.

Since its premiere, the ballet has been danced in many different productions across the world. Two of them stand out as more important than the rest. One was Diaghilev's staging, *The Sleeping Princess*, at the Alhambra Theatre in London in 1921. Old Russia had recently been destroyed by the Bolshevik Revolution, and Diaghilev and his company were in perpetual exile. In staging *The Sleeping Princess* in the West, he saved one of the greatest masterpieces of Russian art, and thenceforth made it international. Not a successful staging at the time, it had a long impact on the history of music and dance in this century. The other staging occurred also in London, at Covent Garden in 1946 after the Second World War. The Royal Opera House was re-opened by Ninette de Valois' staging of the old ballet, with Oliver Messel's new designs. This production, which lasted for twenty years and which won acclaim around the world, was one in which *Beauty* became the signature work of the Royal Ballet. And in 1946 it symbolised also the rebirth of Britain after the privations of the War. *The Sleeping Beauty*, a ballet about many things, is in part about the flowering of civilisation and, after the passing of a black shadow, its recovery. And its most jubilantly civilised feature is its dancing.

by Alistair Macauley

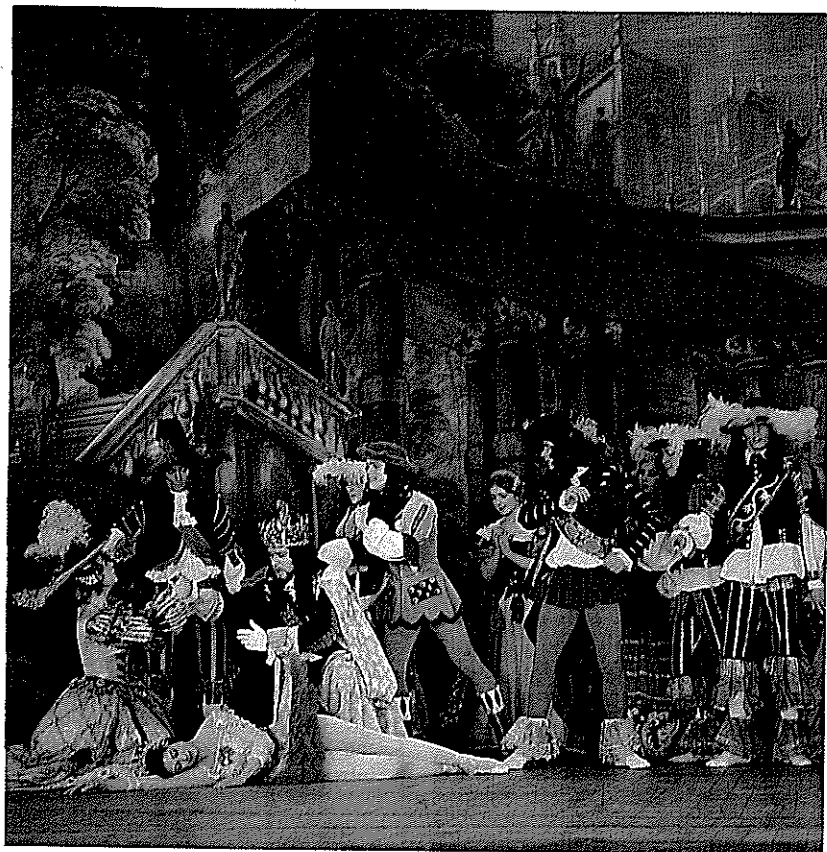


Photo: Roy Round, for Degamo Productions Ltd.

arabesques and attitudes. In this, today, you can see two different traditions of phrasing to the music. Soviet dancers fit the three main components of the movement – the preparation; the balance; the recovery – to the three beats in the bar, as marked by the pizzicato orchestral accompaniment (Bolshoi dancers are closer to the beat than Kirov); Whereas British dancers take the balance on the first, not the second, beat of the bar, and sustain it, responding to the flowing phrases of the solo violin. I'm describing both versions as if they were equally valid; but chances are that you will form a strong preference for one or other as "right". (My heart yearns for the second one, which also sounds – according to the description – remarkably like the way Trefilova danced it with Diaghilev.)

There are also sections of Tchaikovsky's score that Petipa chose not to stage. For example, he commissioned a solo "Sapphire" variation in the "Jewel" pas de quatre

divertissement. No, it is not what Petipa had in mind; but it allows you to hear and see what he put in Tchaikovsky's mind. Likewise, Tchaikovsky composed, at Petipa's request, a variation for Aurora in Act Two; but Petipa – perhaps to please the original Aurora, Carlotta Brianza – chose to use, not this music, but that of the "Jewel" pas de quatre's Gold Fairy. Today we can see either the Soviet version of Petipa's solo – beginning with a brisk, sweeping series of *battements raccourcis* – to the bright "Gold" music; or a later solo made by Ashton (or, with American Ballet Theatre, by Kenneth MacMillan), using Tchaikovsky's original music but with a softer, less striking initial use of those *battements raccourcis*. Or, rather, we can see both versions, and choose which we prefer and why.

Beauty then, is a ballet to pursue. You learn from each good production or good performance that you see; and so you add to the composite picture of the ballet that you build in

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