

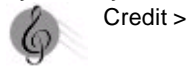
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The Sleeping Beauty

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Music by Peter Ilyitch Tschaikovsky (Op. 66, 1888-1890)



Choreography Peter Martins (after Marius Petipa); The Garland Dance choreographed by George Balanchine

Premiere April 25, 1991, New York City Ballet, New York State Theater

Original Cast Darci Kistler, Kyra Nichols, Merrill Ashley, Lourdes Lopez, Nichol Hlinka, Margaret Tracey, Lauren Hauser, Roma Sosenko, Wendy Whelan, Kathleen Tracey, Yvonne Borrée, Ben Huys, Damian Woetzel, Albert Evans, Bart Cook

Average Length Act I - 1 hr. 14 min. Act II - 47 min.

The notion of turning Charles Perrault's story La Belle au Bois Dormant into a ballet was that of Ivan Vsevolozhsky, Director of the Imperial Theaters in Russia from 1881 until 1889. In May 1888 he wrote to Peter Ilyitch Tschaikovsky: "It wouldn't be a bad idea, by the way, for you to compose a ballet. I have been thinking of writing a libretto based on... The Sleeping Beauty." As described by Vsevolozhsky, the ballet was to be in the style of Louis XIV, with the melodies in the spirit of Lully, Bach, and Rameau, and a quadrille of all the characters from the fairy tales of Perrault in the last act. By December, 1888, Tschaikovsky had started work; he had already received from Marius Petipa a complete working scenario that went into the most minute detail of the action and the bar length of each number, the type of music, and even, on occasion, the actual orchestral effects required, and he worked dutifully in accordance with this scheme. By the end of May, 1889, the ballet was completed, and the orchestration took another two months. The premiere of the ballet was on January 15, 1890, at the Maryinsky Theatre, St. Petersburg, and was performed by the Milanese virtuoso Carlotta Brianza as Aurora, the Sleeping Princess, Marie Petipa as the Lilac Fairy, Pavel Gerdt as Prince Désiré, and the great Enrico Cecchetti as both the evil fairy Carabosse and the Bluebird. The ballet had its dress rehearsal on January 2 before the Tsar and the court, whose reception of the masterpiece was chilly; Tschaikovsky's diary records the

"A BALLERINA IS A PERSONALITY AND A PERSONALITY MEANS IMPROVISATION."

— George Balanchine

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event with mournful brevity. "Rehearsal of the ballet was the Tsar present." "Very nice!!!" "His majesty treated me very haughtily. God bless him." Despite the Imperial Court's initial disinterest, the work swiftly won its public -- among whom was a group of young enthusiasts, the "Neva Pickwickians," whose number included Alexandre Benois, Leon Bakst, and Sergei Diaghilev. Benois noted that their imaginations were fired by the glories of the work, and 30 years later it was Diaghilev's Ballets Russes that brought *The Sleeping Beauty* to the West. In 1921 his company was without a choreographer, and he decided to show his European audiences something of the splendor of the Imperial Ballet. *The Sleeping Beauty*, renamed *The Sleeping Princess*, was thus staged by Nicolai Sergeyev, who had been regisseur at the Maryinsky from 1904-1917, using his Stepanov notation of the choreography. Igor Stravinsky orchestrated the Prelude to Act III and Princess Aurora's variation in Act III. Bronislava Nijinska choreographed some of the ensemble numbers and special interpolated dances. Scenery and costumes were by Bakst. The cast included Olga Spessivtzeva as Aurora, Lydia Lopoukova as the Lilac Fairy, Felia Doubrovska, Lydia Sokolova, Bronislava Nijinska, Lubov Egorova, and Vera Nemtchinova as the fairies, and Brianza, the original Aurora, as the evil Carabosse. The ballet was to be set in the periods of Louis XIV and Louis XV, rather than those of Henri IV and Louis XIV. Bakst's designs were inspired by the architectural designs of the Bibiena family, who designed scenery for the Hapsburg Court from the 1680's until the 1780's. Bakst opened the stage space by "showing restless flights of architecture running off stage toward undetermined vanishing points." The large number of costumes were made in both Paris and London, there being far too many for the Paris house to do alone. Only the most expensive materials were to be used, and Bakst, accompanied by Diaghilev, searched the antique markets of Paris for "braids, tassels, and other ornaments." Before opening night, the original budget had been spent twice over. The complicated preparations led to a postponement of the opening night. The ballet opened on November 2, 1921, but audiences failed to respond to its magnificence. Diaghilev, who had banked everything on a long run, was obliged to close the production in London at an enormous loss. The sets and costumes were seized by creditors, the planned season in Paris was cancelled and the *The Sleeping Princess* was never performed again. However, Diaghilev subsequently staged a shortened version, *Aurora's Wedding*, consisting of divertissements from Act III, with great success. The production of *The Sleeping Princess* was to have a much further reaching result than Diaghilev ever imagined. It was a success, but not in the usual Diaghilev manner. No one who saw those performances would ever think the same way about dancing again. Ninette de Valois, founder of the Royal Ballet, had been a soloist in the Diaghilev company and a fine interpreter of the "finger" variation. She had left Diaghilev in 1926 to form her own academy. In 1939 her English company, the Vic-Wells (later Sadler's Wells), mounted a two-act production of "The Spell" and "The Wedding," which featured a 19-year-old Aurora named Margot Fonteyn. After World War II Sadler's Wells offered a new, full-length production of *The Sleeping Beauty* that closely adhered to the 1890 Petipa version. Mounted by Sergeyev, Diaghilev's ballet master, at Covent Garden, with additional choreography by Frederick Ashton and de Valois, it had costumes and scenery by Oliver Messel. It was this version of the ballet that was presented in New York in 1949, proved to be a triumph for Fonteyn in the title role, and stirred this country's interest in classical ballet. *The Sleeping Beauty* was the first ballet Anna Pavlova saw, when she was eight years old, and it inspired her to become a dancer. Similarly, the first time George Balanchine appeared on stage was as a cupid in *The Sleeping Beauty*. He was a small boy and a pupil at the Imperial Ballet School in St. Petersburg. I was set

down on a gold cage. And suddenly everything opened! A crowd of people, an elegant audience. And the Maryinsky Theatre all light blue and gold! And suddenly the orchestra started playing. I sat on the cage in indescribable ecstasy enjoying it all the music, the theater, and the fact that I was onstage. Thanks to Sleeping Beauty I fell in love with ballet.—Volkov, Balanchine's Tchaikovsky. Balanchine also appeared in the Maryinsky production in the Garland Waltz, as a member of Carabosse's retinue, and in Hop o' My Thumb and Seven Brothers in the last act. Later, as a member of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, he partnered Vera Nemtchinova in the grand pas de deux from Aurora's Wedding. Balanchine never mounted a production of The Sleeping Beauty; he did, however, choreograph the Garland Dance for the 1981 Tchaikovsky Festival, and his choreography is incorporated into Peter Martins' staging of the ballet. For many years it was Lincoln Kirstein's dream to mount the ballet at New York City Ballet. Thus, Mr. Martins chose Mr. Kirstein's 80th birthday celebration, on May 4, 1987, to announce that The Sleeping Beauty would be produced by the Company. This is the most elaborate production ever presented by New York City Ballet, requiring over 100 dancers, including students from the School of American Ballet, and 250 costumes. The scenic designs by David Mitchell utilize numerous methods to change from one lavish setting to the next without breaking the rhythm of the ballet. Mitchell's sets create an atmosphere of fairy tale magic that brings the audience into a mystical world where spells are cast, a fairy comes to the aid of a handsome prince, and Puss in Boots comes to dance for royal guests. Patricia Zipprodt's costumes follow the shift in style from the age of Berain in the court of Louis XIV in the 17th century to the gentlemen and ladies of the court of Louis XV in the 18th century as depicted by Watteau. The lighting, by Mark Stanley, enhances the aura of every scene. Martins has created a streamlined, two-act version that combines the drama and beauty of the original choreography with the speed and energy for which New York City Ballet is known.

Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) New York City Ballet's production of The Sleeping Beauty was the culmination of the Company's commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the birth of Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky. In 1990-1991 New York City Ballet celebrated the relationship between the composer's music, ballet in general, and New York City Ballet in particular. Tchaikovsky is usually thought of as the composer of three scores specifically for ballet: The Nutcracker, Swan Lake, and The Sleeping Beauty. In addition, Balanchine and other Company choreographers have often used many scores not originally intended for ballet. Thus, Serenade, set to the Serenade for Strings, was the first work choreographed by Balanchine after he came to the United States in 1933; Mozartiana, set to the composer's fourth orchestral suite, was one of the last works he did, for the Tchaikovsky Festival in 1981. With Ballet Master In Chief Martins' magnificent new setting of The Sleeping Beauty, which is dedicated to Lincoln Kirstein, the co-founder of New York City Ballet, the Company has a repertory of ballets to the music of Tchaikovsky unparalleled and unmatched by any other company in the world. Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky was one of the 19th century's greatest musical talents and a master of ballet music. He studied at the Conservatory in St. Petersburg (where Balanchine later studied piano and dance) and after graduation taught harmony at the Moscow Conservatory. However, he did not start serious musical training until after he had first tried his hand at a career in law. In 1877 Tchaikovsky began a correspondence with Nadejda von Meck, his patron for fourteen years. Von Meck, whom Tchaikovsky never met in person, provided the composer with a generous allowance. When von Meck thought she was going bankrupt, she cut off the relationship, a crushing blow that affected Tchaikovsky for the rest of his life. Tchaikovsky was also well known as a conductor and in 1891 he led his Marche Solennelle at the opening night

concert at Carnegie Hall. He died in 1893, a few days after conducting the premiere of his Sixth Symphony, "The Pathétique." Tschaikovsky's music is ideally suited to ballet because of its strong, evocative melodic lines, Tschaikovsky's own theatrical sense, and his rich orchestration. His swings from elation to depression are reflected in his music, with its mournful, introspective, and often intensely emotional qualities. In addition to his three ballet scores, he also wrote nine operas, the best known being *Eugen Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*, six symphonies, four concertos, and numerous suites, string quartets, symphonic poems, songs, and other works.

Balanchine, who found inspiration for more than a dozen ballets in his music, said that Tschaikovsky was "the poet of music... he invented time and variation in music for dance." "He intertwines his melody in complex ways... he practically builds Gothic cathedrals out of them, harmonizing inventively, bringing them through different tonalities in a masterful way." (Solomon Volkov, *Balanchine's Tchaikovsky*. Harold Schonberg has written that "ballet is implicit in a very large number of Tschaikovsky's scores," and that they are akin to opera "except that the 'voice' parts are scored for dancers instead of singers." (*Lives of the Great Composers*.) Tschaikovsky himself declared that he could "never understand why 'ballet music' should be used as a contemptuous epithet." He loved the ballet as a child; in later life he called it "the most innocent, the most moral of all the arts." (Letter to a friend and critic, Tanev.) In his biography of Tschaikovsky, John Warrack wrote "... the dance was to release his most delightful, relaxed and charming flow of melody, the 'lyrical idea' which he always claimed as the first inspiration of his music." (Tchaikovsky.) Tschaikovsky rated *The Sleeping Beauty* as one of his best efforts, a view shared by many music critics who prize it as one of the greatest works in the ballet repertoire. "In precisely following Petipa's instructions... Tschaikovsky could forget his neurosis in projecting emotion into the physical movements of the human body. There has never been music that more intimately provokes, as it is provoked by, the dance." (Wilfrid Mellers, *Man and His Music*, Volume 4.

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