

British Theatre Guide

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Sleeping Beauty

Matthew Bourne

New Adventures

Sadlers Wells

1 December 2015–24 January 2016

Matthew Bourne has always revelled in the tongue-in-cheek approach to ballet, renowned for reinventing traditional tales whilst injecting humour, capturing our imagination and delighting us with innovative sets. With *Sleeping Beauty* once again Bourne's magic formula creates a wonderful family-friendly show.

Bourne's *Sleeping Beauty*, his last reinvention of the Tchaikovsky ballet trio, breathes new life into the well-known fairy tale. *Sleeping Beauty* begins onstage as a bouncing, and often boxing, baby, blessed by the fairies but incurring the wrath and curse of the dark fairy Carabosse. It is from there things take delightful twists, introducing a gamekeeper lad as the Princess's suitor and the dark fairy is given a vengeful son.

Bourne is a master at creating characters. He plays with stereotypes and clichés, usually succeeding in staying just the right side of the line to make us chuckle without ending up with the whole work appearing trite. Alongside the more cookie-cutter characters, he allows his Princess Aurora (Ashley Shaw) an infectious gaiety and joie de vivre. This, coupled with her admiring cocky young gamekeeper (Dominic North), makes for delightful duets.

Shaw springs around the stage with bundles of energy as a young Princess before transforming into a wilting, sleep-bound body. Her pas de deux with Shaw is a rare moment of genuine emotion in this otherwise frothy, larger-than-life production. The pair complement each other beautifully, the complicated sequences of lifts and balances look effortless and spontaneous.

Alongside moments of choreographic genius, there are some energetic but less inspired sequences. It isn't until Aurora first is revealed as an adult princess that I'm thrilled by the ballet itself, despite charming staging until that point. The gothic ideas also feel shovelled on a little thick—the addition of vampires at the close of act one leave me torn between cringing or clapping and the killing of Caradoc (the Dark Fairy's son) similarly leaves me cold.

The badly amplified score blights Bourne's *Sleeping Beauty*. All intimacy is lost when a violin sounds as loud as the full orchestra. If Tchaikovsky's once intricate and delightful score was restored, the ballet would gain hugely.

This is a wonderful alternative to the Christmas pantomime: all the wit and humour, alongside a team of talented dancers, some excellent choreography and Lez Brotherston's wonderful stage sets. You will have an incredibly enjoyable evening, but don't expect much emotional engagement.

Reviewer: [Louise Lewis](#)