

# British Theatre Guide

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## Sleeping Beauty

Julius Green

Theatre Royal Windsor

(2011)

Ever since Disney re-released *Sleeping Beauty* back in 2009 as part of the film's 50th anniversary celebrations, the title has enjoyed somewhat of resurgence in Pantoland. Last seen on the Windsor stage in 1993, this year's panto is full of fun.

Familiar faces Kevin Cruise and Steven Blakeley return to Windsor as Princess Aurora's best friend and governess Muddles and Nurse Norah. This is Blakeley's third appearance at the theatre, but first Dame having appearing as Ugly Sister in last year's *Cinderella* and Wishee Washee in 2009's *Aladdin*. Inheriting the mantel from the late Michael Sharvell-Martin and continuing to practice his style of Daming, Blakeley's Nanny Nora is a friendly, slightly eccentric Auntie who the Windsor audience fondly take into their hearts.

In his second pantomime for the theatre, Cruise drives the show with his friendly Comic and is afforded some of the best set pieces of the evening's entertainment. His trademark musical mash up makes it into the narrative, but unfortunately the slosh scene falls flat without the presence of Blakeley's Dame or any structure; merely tipping goo over each other's head and sliding on the floor does not constitute a slosh scene.

Female led narratives such as *Sleeping Beauty* offer actresses some of the most glorious roles in pantomime and none more so than the villainous Carabosse played by Britt Ekland. Ekland's bad fairy is straight out of a Hammer horror movie; bathed in green she reaches to the heavens, throws her head back and cackles relishing the boos. To the delight of the audience, her pet chihuahua Tequila also appears as Rasputin the Spy enabling Ekland to show off her comic side as she gives the cute little pup a ferocious build up.

For a romance narrative, this *Sleeping Beauty* offers little in the way of love, with Act One's sprawling narrative focusing on the build up to the Princess' big birthday bash. Julius Green's script has some nice touches, such as a school room flashback, Nurse Norah's magic medicine freeing Muddles and her from the 100-year-old sleep and Carabosse entering the party disguised as a fortune teller. But it does seem rather unfair for Principal Girl Chloe Madeley that Green has christened his somewhat self assured Prince, played by Bradley Clarkson, Percy and that her character is a sucker for sweets considering she has a lisp.

Throughout the show there are a number of cameos to fill the time and as Al Fresco and King of the Elves, Graham Newell proves yet again that he is a talented character actor. Maybe next year he'll finally be given a meatier role having performed at the venue for the last five years? The second act's Elf Land is a delight under Newell's command and even the script acknowledges the somewhat ludicrous nature of Noddy appearing to give Muddles and Nurse Norah the Fiendish Elfish Secret Weapon which will help them defeat Carabosse and rescue the Prince.

Participation is vital in any pantomime and in Windsor this means bombarding the stage with foam snowballs to freeze the not-so-ferocious Dragon's fiery breath, voiced by Christopher Biggins. The audience go wild with excitement as they smash the fourth wall of theatre. The more frequently it is broken down, the more enjoyable the show and Windsor successfully achieves a strong shared community due to their constant audience acknowledgment and engagement.

Tony Christie and Anita Harris as the King and Queen shine when singing, although the production would benefit from some more recent songs, and everyone delights in Christie's rendition of 'Is This The Way To Amarillo?' when he is finally permitted to sing it after suggesting the Texan city as a honeymoon destination.

With plenty of fun for all the family, 2011's *Sleeping Beauty* is the best pantomime Windsor has seen in a long time.

*Sleeping Beauty plays at the Theatre Royal Windsor until 8th January 2012*

**Reviewer:** [Simon Sladen](#)