

# British Theatre Guide

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## The Sleeping Beauty

Choreography by Marius Petipa, Lev Ivanov, Peter Wright, music by Tchaikovsky  
Birmingham Royal Ballet  
Sadler's Wells  
24–27 April 2024

Sadler's Wells is the last port of call for Birmingham Royal Ballet's fortieth anniversary celebration tour of Sir Peter Wright's production of *The Sleeping Beauty*. The dancers must be exhausted. Southampton, Birmingham Hippodrome, Salford, Sunderland, Plymouth, Bristol last week, but smiles light up the stage as well as Mark Jonathan's lighting adapted by Johnny Westall-Eyre.

Philip Prowse's set, and costume designs, is spectacular—very Louis XIV (1643–1715), very Charles Perrault (1628–1703), writer of this *Sleeping Beauty* fairy tale version, in which good triumphs over evil. Add to this Tchaikovsky's beautiful music, so familiar, played live by the Royal Ballet Sinfonia, conducted vigorously by Philip Ellis, and it's an evening to delight a first time family audience.

Some audience members get up to leave the theatre as the curtain comes down for the second interval, after the awakening kiss at the end of act II, thinking this is the happy ending. A pity to miss the entertaining act III with its fairy tale court divertissements—Bluebird and the Enchanted Princess, Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, Puss-in-Boots and the White Cat (a pert Daria Stanculescu, the first night's Carabosse)—at the wedding of Princess Aurora and Prince Florimund, and their triumphal *Grand pas*.

I had hoped to see Alina Cojocaru guesting as Aurora on this second night in London, but it is not to be. Miki Mizutani is Aurora with Max Maslen as her Prince. Petite, with strong technique—she polishes off the Rose adagio with assured strength—if inscrutable personality. This works well in a sixteen-year-old girl coming out into the regal court, and after a hundred-year sleep into a new world. Maslen is a gentle Prince. She is safe in his hands.

But, the evening's best is the good Lilac Fairy and bitter Carabosse, who both inhabit their roles with great conviction. Children will love this mimetic (there's lots of mime) battle. Gabriel Anderson debuts as Carabosse, a pantomimic role, which can be played by either male and female character dancers. I seem to remember Anthony Dowell in the role, and David Bintley.

He is great, a tall 'drag' Carabosse, and he plays it up to the hilt. He gets booed as the villain at curtain call as at all good pantos and he should take it in good faith as praise. Ellis Small as the Lilac Fairy is perfect in her gorgeous gown—not, as at the Royal Ballet, a tutu role. She is beautiful and looks (am I being perverse?) like Angelina Jolie as Malificent—wrong role I know...

Rory Mackay's King's Master of Ceremonies Catalabutte is the fall guy for the situation—he forgot to put Carabosse on the christening invite list, though the King and Queen perused it. Amongst the flouncing princes and gentlemen Gus Payne as Gallison, the Prince's Aide, diverts one's focus, proving no role is too small to make a mark.

*The Sleeping Beauty* opened the Royal Opera House after its Second World War closure with Nicholas Sergeyev's production after Petipa, with additions by Frederick Ashton and Ninette de Valois. Birmingham Royal Ballet's programme harks back to Ashton, George Balanchine and Kenneth MacMillan and "the sheer genius" of Petipa's *Sleeping Beauty*, a "lesson" for them all, the pivot of classical ballet.

Six years this *Sleeping Beauty* has been lying dormant in Birmingham (the Royal Ballet's was seen only last year): BRB brings it back to life with some style. Nearly three hours with two intervals, about thirty dancers, a traditional ballet to inspire future generations, it is a hardy perennial. Good to see some of the younger BRB dancers getting a chance to shine on stage.

**Reviewer:** [Vera Liber](#)