

Ballet: The Sleeping Beauty
Choreography: Marius Petipa
Composer: Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

The Story

"The Sleeping Beauty" is one of the most celebrated ballets in the classical canon, tracing its origins back to the fairy tale by Charles Perrault.

The ballet begins with the christening of Princess Aurora, the newborn daughter of the King and Queen. Despite an attempt to invite all the fairies in the kingdom, the wicked fairy Carabosse is overlooked. In retaliation, Carabosse casts a spiteful curse on Aurora: she will prick her finger on a spindle and die. However, the Lilac Fairy, Aurora's fairy godmother, softens the curse. Instead of dying, Aurora will fall into a deep sleep, only to be awakened by a prince's kiss.

The second act is set on Aurora's sixteenth birthday. As predicted, she pricks her finger on a spindle given to her by Carabosse, who is disguised as an old woman. Aurora falls into a deep sleep, and the Lilac Fairy casts a spell over the entire kingdom, causing everyone to sleep until Aurora awakens.

In the third act, the Lilac Fairy appears to Prince Désiré in a dream and shows him the sleeping Aurora. Entranced by her beauty, the Prince is led to the castle where he awakens Aurora with a kiss. The spell is broken and the entire kingdom wakes up with her.

The ballet concludes with a grand wedding celebration for Aurora and Prince Désiré, attended by various fairy tale characters. The couple performs a grand pas de deux, and the ballet ends in a joyful tableau as everyone celebrates the power of love to conquer all obstacles.

The History of the Fairy Tale

The fairy tale "The Sleeping Beauty" has a rich history, originating from Charles Perrault's "La Belle au bois dormant," first published in 1697 in his work "Histoires ou Contes du temps passé." Perrault's tale was itself influenced by earlier stories with similar themes, such as the Italian "Sun, Moon, and Talia" by Giambattista Basile. In Perrault's version, it is the prince's mother who is the ogre, intending to eat Sleeping Beauty and her children. Yet, it is this version that became prominent in the Western world.

In the 19th century, the Brothers Grimm included a version of "The Sleeping Beauty," titled "Little Briar Rose," in their collection of fairy tales. This version is largely similar to Perrault's, but with some key differences. In the Grimms' version, it is not a fairy but a wise woman who is slighted and places the curse on the princess. Unlike in Perrault's tale, there is no epilogue involving an ogre; the story ends with the princess's awakening.

The History of the Ballet

"The Sleeping Beauty" ballet, one of the most popular classical ballets, was first performed in 1890, at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia. The music was composed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, while the original choreography was by Marius Petipa. The ballet was based on Charles Perrault's fairy tale "La Belle au bois dormant," which was adapted by the ballet's librettist, Ivan Vsevolozhsky.

Tchaikovsky's score for "The Sleeping Beauty" is considered one of his best works, intricately woven with the narrative and characters. The ballet is notable for its grand pas de deux, a dance duet that highlights the technical prowess of the lead ballet dancers, especially in the wedding scene of Princess Aurora and Prince Désiré.

Over the years, the ballet has been staged by numerous ballet companies across the globe, each adding their unique touch to the choreography while retaining the core elements of Petipa's original. Some famous versions include those by the Royal Ballet in London, the Paris Opera Ballet, and the American Ballet Theatre.