

Review: Matthew Bourne's *Sleeping Beauty*

By Suzanne Cleave

***Matthew Bourne's Sleeping Beauty* at Theatre Royal Plymouth**

Matthew Bourne's Sleeping Beauty is a spellbinding reimagining of the classic fairy tale – with a twist!

As with all fairy tales, it begins with 'Once Upon a Time...', but unlike the Disney version many of us are used to, Bourne weaves in fairies and vampires to the mix.

Sleeping Beauty, a gothic romance begins in 1890 after we learn Carabosse, the Dark Fairy, provided King Benedict and Queen Eleanor with the one thing they did not have – a daughter. But, dismayed that she didn't receive the recognition she deserved, she vows to take revenge on the royal family and puts a curse on Aurora.

We first meet Aurora as a baby, a puppet brilliantly worked by the cast, climbing up the curtains and keeping her nanny on her toes. As well as the royal staff, Aurora is also looked after by the god fairies, whose dancing is impeccable.

As Aurora grows, the production moves to 1911. Carabosse is dead, but her desire for revenge is very much alive in the guise of her son Caradoc (Paris Fitzpatrick). While Aurora prepares for her coming-of-age party, she dreams of the royal gamekeeper Leo, but at the party, Leo sees her dancing with another man – Caradoc! Before he gets the chance to step on, Aurora pricks her finger on one of Caradoc's black roses and falls into a deep sleep.

There's a further twist, as Leo is bitten and becomes immortal to ensure he is around in 100 years to wake Aurora from her slumber. But will love triumph and will good overturn evil?

This gothic ballet had the audience captivated from start to finish. The central romance between Aurora and Leo (Ashley Shaw and Andrew Monaghan) is simply heart-warming.

The imagination that has gone into the set design and the costumes is remarkable. The set transforms from an opulent palace to an enchanted forest so seamlessly, transporting the audience further into this mystical world. The costumes are divine – each of the fairies, both good and bad, have different costumes and wings. Lez Brotherston has had a long collaboration with Bourne, and his work here is breath-taking.

Bourne's company New Adventures celebrates its 25th year in 2022, and the reimagining of Tchaikovsky's ballet is a fitting way to mark the milestone. Bourne, the



production team and the cast bring the story of Sleeping Beauty to life.

Even if you don't think ballet is for you, give this a watch and you may be pleasantly surprised – it's simply stunning!



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