

# WAUSAU DANCE THEATRE



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## **Sleeping Beauty** **Story, Character/Production Information and Music Detail**

In a faraway land, long ago, lived a King and his fair Queen. For many years they had longed for a child and finally their wish was granted. A daughter was born and they called her Aurora, after the Goddess of the Dawn, for she filled their lives with warmth.

To celebrate her birth, a great holiday was proclaimed throughout the kingdom. Knights and ladies, townspeople and peasants from all the surrounding kingdoms were invited to attend the festivities. King Hubert brought his young son prince Phillip and the two kings announced that one day the neighboring kingdoms would be united by the marriage of Princess Aurora to Prince Phillip.

As the merriment continued three beautiful fairies and their attendants arrived to bless the infant with their gifts of beauty, grace and happiness. All was perfect until an unexpected visit by the evil fairy Maleficent and her ravens. Furious at not being invited Maleficent announced, that she too had a gift for the baby. The Princess shall indeed grow in grace and beauty, beloved by all who know her. But before the sun sets on her sixteenth birthday, she will prick her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel and – die!”

As the evil Maleficent vanished in a cloud of smoke, a sadness fell over the Kingdom. It was then that the third fairy Merryweather stepped forward. For she had not yet given her gift, and though she did not have the power to undo the fearful curse, she could change the prophecy allowing the princess to fall into a deep sleep only to be awoken by true loves first kiss.

Still fearful for his daughter’s life, the king declared that every spinning wheel in the kingdom should, on that very day be burned. The fairies, still unsure, she would be safe, persuaded the King and Queen to let them take Aurora away to raise her in the forest. And for sixteen long years the Princess, grew up, hidden away with the birds, butterflies, and flowers for her friends

Finally on the day of Auroras 16<sup>th</sup> Birthday, she would be taken back to the castle where the entire kingdom was awaiting the return of their beloved Princess. There would be a great gathering including performances by Little Red Riding Hood, Tom Thumb and friends, Blue Bird and Puss ‘n Boots. Yet, in the midst of the celebration, Maleficent disguised as an old beggar would join the festivities unnoticed by all – all except the Princess herself. And as she had done before, Maleficent cast a spell on Aurora – drawing her to the spinning wheel until she couldn’t resist to touch the spindle. As the Princess fell at the feet of the King, the fairies realized what had happened, they could not believe they had left the Princess alone for even one moment. They knew what must be done, and with a wave of their hands – they sprinkled sleep-dust on the entire kingdom. Then set off to find Prince Phillip and convince him that he must find the castle and defeat Maleficent -- for only true loves first kiss could awaken the Sleeping Beauty.

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## Characters:

**Princess Aurora “Sleeping Beauty”** - The story’s protagonist. Given beauty, talent, and riches at birth, Aurora symbolizes all that is good, and she is the prize of Stefan’s kingdom.

Though Aurora makes her first appearance toward the middle of the ballet, the audience can be sure of one thing: She holds steadfastly to one dream, the dream of true love. She exists more as a concept than as a complex character. In *Sleeping Beauty*, however, Aurora’s unchangeable nature is exactly the point. She’s pure, innocent, and good from the start. Flora and Fauna give her the gifts of beauty and grace.

**King Stefan** - Princess Aurora’s father.

**King Hubert** -Prince Phillip’s father.

**The Queen:** Auroras Mother.

**Lady in Waiting-** Takes care of the Queen and makes sure things run smoothly.

**The Kings Butler-** Always with the King and Court. “George” is a constant in the castle.

**Court Jester-** Comedic relief for the court and characters.

**Prince Phillip** - The nobleman betrothed to Aurora as a young boy who falls in love with her. Prince Phillip is proud and willingly fights to the death in the name of love and goodness. He is noble, charming, and humble. You will see him as a little boy and then as he fights Maleficent.

## The Fairies:

**Merryweather** - The leader of the three fairies. She is the fairy whose grants Sleeping Beauty the gift of eternal sleep until she is found by her true love instead of death. She is the great protector of Aurora.

**Fauna and Flora**-The fairies who take care of Sleeping Beauty when she is hidden away. They have also given her gifts of beauty, grace and kindness at her baptism

*The three good fairies are completely in control of the storyline as they take us from beginning to end.*

*They bless Aurora in the beginning with the gifts of Grace and Beauty, and Merryweather luckily has blessed her with sleep not death, as she awaits her prince.*

**Maleficent** – The evil witch who puts a deadly curse on Aurora and rules alone atop a craggy mountain beneath a swirling green cloud. Everything about Maleficent's presence is ugly: her black and purple cloak, her sharp and angular frame, the curdling raven on her shoulder, her long yellow fingers, and the green gases that signal her appearance. Maleficent embodies pure evil. She exists to challenge the pure goodness of Aurora and Stefan's kingdom.

*Nothing happens to turn Maleficent evil. No back story is offered or hinted at to explain her malevolence—she has just simply always been evil. Since she has no past, there are no grounds for any sympathy for her. In the logic of the fairy tale, she exists to define the complete opposite of the good characters, Aurora, Phillip, and the fairies. Therefore, her motivations never change. Her experience does not follow an arc or lead to change. She shows up wanting to do hurtful things, and she dies wanting to do hurtful things. Her character is drawn so ominously that there is never any question whose side the audience should be on. Solitary, angular, and horned. She proclaims death to Aurora, but Merryweather skillfully changes that to a deep sleep.*

**Maleficent's Ravens** - A jet-black harbingers of doom who serve as Maleficent's right-hand men. This mindless pack of helmeted ravens scurry around Maleficent guarding her chambers and doing her bidding.

## **Act II Birthday Party Performers include:**

**Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf** – is original to the Story of Sleeping Beauty.

**Blue Bird** – The Blue Bird is one of the friends of Sleeping Beauty from the Forest.

**Tom Thumb** – These little Boys mock Maleficent in an attempt to get her to reveal herself.

**Puss In Boots** – Foreshadowing the sword fight at the end, and also beware of the person behind the mask.

## **The Story of Sleeping Beauty Through the Ages:**

Charles Perrault's version, "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," was the model for Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* and we have chosen this story as the model of our production. The story appears in Perrault's famous 1697 *Histoires, or Stories of Past Times*. Extreme violence permeates his version, which continues the story after the Prince and the Princess are united. As Perrault tells it, the blissful couple do indeed marry and have children. But the Prince never tells his family about the marriage, and Sleeping Beauty never questions his decision. Soon the Prince must leave for war. He finally tells his mother about the marriage and leaves his wife under her care.

Disney's version was not the first film adaptation of the Sleeping Beauty tales, nor was it the first animated version. German pioneer animator Lotte Reiniger, who was best known for shadow puppet animation, produced at least two artistically advanced animated adaptations of the Sleeping Beauty tale. One version appeared as early as 1922. Friz Freleng, who directed Bugs Bunny cartoons, made a 1942 adaptation called "Foney Fables" that incorporated elements of many old fairy tales. In the "Sleeping Beauty" segment of this cartoon, Prince Charming yells at Sleeping Beauty for sleeping in. Izzy Sparber, who directed Popeye cartoons, then entered the mix with 1947's "Wotta Knight." Bluto and Popeye fight over Olive Oyl, playing tug-of-war with her pigtails in a battle for her love.

### **Sleeping Beauty Score**

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky created the score of *The Sleeping Beauty* for the Imperial Ballet at St. Petersburg's Maryinsky Theater. First performed January 3, 1890, the now-classic ballet was originally created by Ivan Vsevolozhsky and choreographed by Marius Petipa. In a legendary demonstration of passion, Tchaikovsky composed the entire score in only forty days.

### **Persistent Melodies**

Tchaikovsky incorporated musical motifs for each of the main characters, and they appear both simply and within more complex orchestral arrangements throughout the ballet. Tchaikovsky stayed very close to the storyline of *The Sleeping Beauty* as he composed his score, the result of which is a tightly woven arrangement that moves the story and its themes forward.

Almost every major character in *Sleeping Beauty* has his or her own musical reference that emphasizes his or her particular personality. Every time Maleficent appears, for example, harsh brass instruments whine, shriek, or burst suddenly from the silence, while the bows of cellos and basses slither ominously on low-register strings. The characters in *Sleeping Beauty* aren't difficult to evaluate, and musical accompaniments are not needed to further an understanding of them. Instead, these repeated and consistent musical accompaniments serve as triggers of a sort, to increase the tension, movement, and cohesiveness of the film. In particular, the music that surrounds Maleficent intensifies her evil intentions and serves as a kind of foreshadowing—we know something bad is coming when Maleficent appears and we hear her ominous accompaniment.