



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Timeless Vision of Elegance: Splendor of Sleeping Beauty

Opera di Roma, 20.09.2024 [ENA]

Sleeping Beauty, set to the enchanting score of Pëtr Il'ic Cajkovskij, stands as one of the most celebrated ballets in the classical repertoire. But this production, under the brilliant direction of choreographer Jean-Guillaume Bart, conductor Kevin Rhodes, and the combined genius of set and costume designer Aldo Buti, delivers an experience that surpasses expectations. The production's visual mastery, from its baroque-inspired stage settings to its intricately designed costumes, elevates the timeless fairy tale into an unforgettable feast for the eyes and soul.

From the moment the curtain rises, audiences are transported into a magical world where beauty, grandeur, and sophistication reign supreme. Aldo Buti's stage design is nothing short of breathtaking. Drawing heavily from Baroque aesthetics, the sets are a visual manifestation of splendor and opulence. Each backdrop and scene is rich with intricate details that evoke the era of Louis XIV, where royal courts flourished in gilded grandeur and artistic excess.

The castle, where much of the ballet's action unfolds, is a masterpiece of design. Towering columns adorned with delicate gilding, tapestries rich with texture and color, and chandeliers dripping with crystals create an ambiance of timeless elegance. The gardens surrounding the palace, too, are brought to life with a palette that evokes the lushness of Versailles, giving the dancers a stage that feels almost ethereal in its beauty.

One of the most striking aspects of the stage setting is the way it merges seamlessly with the choreography. In moments of dance, the grandiosity of the set serves as a beautiful contrast to the grace and fluidity of the dancers, particularly in scenes like Aurora's birthday celebration in Act I, where the lavish banquet hall offers the perfect backdrop to the delicate, intricate steps of the corps de ballet. The balance of opulence and airiness, of grandeur and lightness, is a testament to the designer's ability to evoke the Baroque era while keeping the stage dynamic and flexible for the physical demands of the ballet.

In the final act, where Prince Désiré awakens the sleeping Aurora, the castle setting seems to take on a life of its own. The layers of gold, deep reds, and blues, so reminiscent of Baroque opulence, shift subtly with the lighting to reflect the transition from slumber to awakening, from darkness to light. The effect is magical, a visual metaphor for the narrative arc of the ballet itself, moving from stillness into the joyous celebration of Aurora's revival.

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If the stage setting was a marvel, Aldo Buti's costume design was nothing less than spectacular. Drawing inspiration from the lavish fashion of the Baroque period, each costume is an artwork in its own right, dripping with the finest details, luxurious fabrics, and an extraordinary attention to period authenticity. The dancers moved like living paintings, their bodies draped in satins, velvets, and brocades that shimmered under Vinicio Cheli's carefully crafted lighting.

Aurora, the heroine of our tale, was truly a vision to behold. Her costumes, especially in the iconic Rose Adagio, were a celebration of femininity and regal poise. The soft pinks, delicate gold embroidery, and cascading skirts transformed her into the epitome of a Baroque princess. As Aurora moved through her balances and promenades, the gentle swish of her skirt added an additional layer of beauty to the choreography, enhancing every turn, arabesque, and leap.

The fairies, too, were a feast for the eyes. Each represented a different virtue, and Buti's designs cleverly reflected these characteristics through both color and fabric. The Fairy of Joy sparkled in brilliant yellows, her gown light and airy like the joy she symbolized. The Lilac Fairy, a central figure in guiding Prince Désiré to Aurora, was regal in shades of lavender and violet, her gown accented with shimmering threads that caught the light in her every movement. These visual cues, paired with the dancers' expressive performances, gave the audience an immediate understanding of the characters, even without the use of words.

One cannot discuss the costumes without mentioning the fabulous court attire of the King, Queen, and noble guests. The regal finery of the court costumes was a marvel of Baroque fashion—men in elaborately embroidered waistcoats and jackets, women in voluminous gowns adorned with lace and jewels. These costumes not only transported the audience back to an era of elegance and refinement but also added a rich texture to the overall visual aesthetic of the production. Each costume, whether for a principal dancer or a member of the corps, was crafted with such care that it contributed to the illusion that we had truly stepped into a royal court of the Baroque era.

Of course, none of the visual splendor of this production would mean anything without the exquisite performances of the dancers. Jean-Guillaume Bart's choreography, while rooted in the classical vocabulary, breathes new life into the familiar steps of Sleeping Beauty. His approach respects the traditional Petipa choreography but adds subtle refinements, allowing the dancers to imbue their movements with a sense of personal expression while maintaining the precision and clarity that the ballet demands.

Aurora, in this production, was a revelation. Her technical prowess was matched only by the depth of her character portrayal. In the first act, during the iconic Rose Adagio, she demonstrated not just the perfect balances and promenades that are expected but also a sense of youthful joy and excitement. Her

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interpretation of Aurora's transformation from a young girl on the brink of womanhood to a mature and regal princess was deeply moving. Her every movement felt like an extension of the music, and in her final pas de deux with Prince Désiré, she embodied the grace, beauty, and majesty that defines this role.

The Prince, too, was a highlight of the evening. His solo variations were marked by a clarity of line and a strength that felt effortless. His partnership with Aurora was tender and supportive, and together they brought the fairy tale's climactic pas de deux to life with a sense of wonder and enchantment. Their chemistry on stage was palpable, and the joy of their reunion after Aurora's long sleep was beautifully conveyed through their shared moments of dance.

The corps de ballet, often the unsung heroes of such productions, performed with a unity and precision that were truly awe-inspiring. Whether portraying courtly guests, garland dancers, or the fairy attendants, each member of the corps contributed to the overall magic of the production. Their movements were synchronized perfectly with the rhythms of Cajkovskij's lush score, and their graceful formations provided a living frame for the principal dancers' solos and pas de deux.

Lighting designer Vinicio Cheli deserves immense praise for his work in this production. His ability to use light as a narrative tool was particularly effective in *Sleeping Beauty*, where the passage of time, the shift from dream to reality, and the contrast between good and evil are so central to the story. Cheli's lighting mirrored these shifts with subtle brilliance.

In the darker moments of the ballet, such as the appearance of the wicked Carabosse, the stage was bathed in ominous shades of red and purple, casting long shadows that heightened the sense of danger and menace. By contrast, the scenes featuring the benevolent Lilac Fairy were lit with soft, ethereal tones, enveloping the stage in a warm, protective glow. The final act, with its joyous celebration of Aurora and Désiré's union, was illuminated with golden hues that reflected the happiness and harmony of the moment.

No ballet is complete without the music that carries it, and under the baton of conductor Kevin Rhodes, Cajkovskij's score came alive in all its emotional depth and melodic richness. The orchestra played with both precision and passion, their performance perfectly synchronized with the dancers' movements. Rhodes' ability to draw out the full range of Cajkovskij's emotional palette—romance, suspense, joy—added an extra layer of magic to the performance, making it a truly immersive experience for the audience.

This production of *Sleeping Beauty* is a true testament to the power of collaboration in the world of ballet. From the intricate choreography to the opulent sets and costumes, every element of the production worked in harmony to create a visual and emotional experience that left the audience spellbound. The combination

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of Aldo Buti's stunning stage and costume design, Vinicio Cheli's evocative lighting, Jean-Guillaume Bart's inspired choreography, and Kevin Rhodes' masterful conducting resulted in a ballet that was not only a feast for the eyes but also a deeply moving artistic achievement. The Sleeping Beauty was a dazzling triumph, a production that will linger in the hearts and minds of all who were lucky enough to witness its magic.

Bericht online lesen:

https://mariusz.en-a.de/kunst_kultur_und_musik/timeless_vision_of_elegance_splendor_of_sleeping_beauty-89911/

Redaktion und Verantwortlichkeit:

V.i.S.d.P. und gem. § 6 MDStV: Dr. Nadejda Komendantova

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