



Of Various Princesses

Are beautiful and ugly behaviors conjoined twins? How ironic is anger?

Go know.

by Deborah Jowitz

November 8th, 2005 3:01 PM

What is it with the "Sleeping Beauty" story?

Why would being left off the guest list for a royal christening engender such rage in a fairy that she'd condemn the baby princess to teenage death? This isn't a question Donald Byrd wants to answer in his *The Sleeping Beauty Notebook*; it's one he wants to pose. And pose and pose. His is no transplanted version of a ballet classic, like his 1996 *The Harlem Nutcracker*. This violently deconstructed version of *Beauty* for Seattle's Spectrum Dance Theater is meant to set the story rocketing around in our brains. Is the wicked fairy Carabosse a terrorist? asks dramaturge Thomas DeFrantz, bounding down the aisle to stop some scrupulously constructed mayhem. No, respond audience members—no political agenda here. Perhaps her anger is the take-no-prisoners rage of the marginalized.

What is beauty? Byrd likes *that* question. And the members of Spectrum relish embodying it. Byrd took over the company in 2002, transforming it from a light-jazz ensemble into a spunky, muscular bunch of dancers unafraid to get down and dirty. He uses Tchaikovsky's score for the 1890 ballet and some of Marius Petipa's choreography, but Lara Seefeldt, his Aurora (or one of them?), is a blunt little powerhouse who aces the "Rose Adagio" high-heeled in a bar with suitors who drink a lot and find her very, very hot. Carabosse isn't just mop-haired harridan Danielle Wilkins, who invades the christening shrieking "motherfucker!"; she's also tall, sexy Julia Wilkins in purple satin (and one of the piece's commentators), who tauntingly hurls the infant Aurora doll to the floor and later pricks a voodoo Barbie, making the princess writhe. In the end it's Wilkins, one of a heap of white-tutu-clad "sleepers" on a huge bed (set by Craig Wollam), who gets the prince. Or not. He (David Alewine) bangs his head trying to get away from the horny bevy of awakened women, and the two perform a powerful, erotic pas de deux on the floor with him semi-conscious. The famous kiss becomes her attempt to rouse him with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

Byrd's construction is a patchwork quilt of references that riff entertainingly or provocatively off one another. The main scenes happen on the elegant faux-mosaic floorcloth (lit by Jack Mehler), as do mime summations of the plot's crux, the seven-minute condensed version, and three quickie retellings by various street types. The bawdy, finger-pricking birthday feast seems to be set in Renaissance Venice (great

costumes by Nancy Brous), but the Lilac Fairy (Christina Cooley), arriving to prescribe sleep instead of death, is pushed in on the DTW stage crew's telescoping "Genie." The two-hour piece, which too often rambles as it digresses, is stuffed with dancing. Everyone in the powerful cast has outbursts of Byrd's style of brute ballet—fast, strident, dense with brusque footwork, and studded with raunchy pantomime. Traditional concepts of beauty and grace enter only as irony.

Entertaining Beauty might be a good title.



Notebook's Lilac Fairy Christina Cooley
photo: Cary Conover

Donald Byrd/Spectrum Dance Theater
Dance Theater Workshop
219 West 19th Street
212-924-0077
Through Saturday

Jodi Melnick and Scott Heron
Dance Theater Workshop
October 26 through 29