

Theatre Orangeville's 'Sleeping Beauty - A Fairy's Tale' fills Opera House with laughter

By Constance Scrafield

This year, Theatre Orangeville's Pantomime, 'Sleeping Beauty - A Fairy's Tale' is very funny right away.

Gorgeous, song-filled and full of surprises, this show is on until December 21. With no video recording for future enjoyment, get your tickets now for your first, second, or third... chance to have such a good time.

In brief, the three fairies 'Sophia, Merriweather and Larry' lead us through the story and provide occasional insights with the show's own musical interludes of everyone's favourite old and new songs 'so cleverly, so irreverently re-written.

Traditionally, the birth of a baby girl to the king and queen of their own land sees an invitation to the local fairies to come and bless the child and Sophia, Merriweather and Larry are ready and willing.

Traditionally, the old story goes that the wicked fairy, in this case, Maleficent, is not invited, out of fear of her wickedness. Duty calls the audience to boo every time she appears and the comic that she is, Debbie Collins as Maleficent reminds us if ever we are slow to do so.

Almost true to tradition, Maleficent curses the child with a forever sleep by pricking her finger before midnight of her 18th birthday. How to conceal the child until she is safely past that dire time needs a solution.

So, Collins and David Nairn, co-playwrights of this second panto after last year's 'Cinderella - if the Shoe Fits,' turn Sleeping Beauty on its head and the audiences have a ball with the upset.

One way or another, there must be a prince; there should be true love but none of it is predictable. The only way to know is to come and see the show.

The sole guide fair to be offered is to follow the quirky line of music the cast sing variously along with other references woven throughout the show, touching on songs re-written from the '50s and classic music from Gilbert and Sullivan 'all the way up to contemporary pop music.

This is really fun.

Andrew McGillivray is making his Theatre Orangeville debut in the role of Sophia (anyone thinking of those Golden Girls?), an outrageous Fairy Dame of generous wisdom and a strong sense of protecting the baby princess.

Christina Gordon, also here for the first time, plays the darling Merriweather, the middle Fairy, telling us stories as the story unfolds.

Ben Skipper has managed to spend his whole time here in Orangeville as he returns to Theatre Orangeville in the role of Larry the Fairy, narrator some of the time, who instructs the audience early on as to their own role in the show 'a very vibrant part of all pantos: the responses and, of course, the booing.

He is all this and Maleficent's Raven, named Diablo. A terrifying duo, to be sure.

The lovely Annika Tupper is the princess at risk of Maleficent's eventual curse but called Bella to keep her safe. All innocence at her approaching 18th birthday but who knows what traps and confusion will confront her?

Bringing the questions is William Lincoln as the local royalty, which he seems to nearly forget by his personal search for a mission. Something to do with art, he thinks.

In every way, music leads and rules this story and this is a cast of extremely talented singers. Often comical, the lyrics take liberties with the songs they mimic for high entertainment but whatever the song, the singing was simply wonderful and this writer felt one must be in any of the top popular theatres, anywhere to hear such fine voices.

Under the directorship of musical director and accompanist, Nicholas Mustapha, he provides every note they need and, in jest, suffers their jibes, as a loyal participant of Theatre Orangeville.

And David Nairn, not only as co-author, but also directing this wonderful, hilarious couple of hours of entertainment ? how does he do it? Sometimes, demurring, he claims to need only keep out of the way of the highly talented actors but he cannot shy away from the stupendous skill it has taken to match the potential chaos that could happen backstage to the coherent and delightful action on stage. His mastery is all in evidence in this show. We can be sure, his hand is everywhere in the clever writing (along with Debby Collins) and the truly successful production of this rollicking and busy fantasy.

The setting for all this is once again, by designer Beckie Morris' ingenuity and love of beauty within the set, and the timing of Chris Malkowski's lighting.

One pauses to describe the costumes, which, designed and constructed with equal genius by the brilliant Wendi Speck, they at once sparkle and make us laugh; they are fabulous, whimsical and really do justice to such a great production.

This is only the second Panto at Theatre Orangeville but there are good reasons to hope Panto will continue to dazzle the holiday season's stage.

Be sure to buy tickets to this wonderful, spirited and excellent Panto show, a completely new take on a very old, well-loved story. In many ways, you may love this one better.

For more details and to buy tickets, go to www.theatreorangeville.ca You can call box office at 519-942-3423 or pop in at 87 Broadway, Orangeville.