

# 'Sleeping Beauty Wakes' fun for adults, too

By Jim Farber

THEATER CRITIC

Sleeping Beauty. She's been the star of a fairy tale, a ballet, a cartoon and a theme park ride with its own towering castle.

Now the dozing diva can add a whimsical musical to her résumé, "Sleeping Beauty Wakes," co-produced by Deaf West Theatre and the Center Theatre Group.

On stage at the Kirk Douglas Theatre in Culver City, this gentle cautionary fable about the anguish of sleep disorders, the deleterious effects of over-protective parenting, and the inevitability of teenage rebellion, is as big and bright as a Nickelodeon show.

But though it's targeted at kids, "Sleeping Beauty Wakes" is so playfully exuberant, sophisticated in its musicality and adroit in its performances, that the show is thoroughly enjoyable for adults. And since it's a Deaf West Theatre creation, parts are signed as well as spoken, with the addition of projected titles. It also features the hip musical ensemble GrooveLily.

The premise, as conceived by Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda (who wrote the music and lyrics), and Rachel Sheinkin (who wrote the book), is that Sleeping Beauty (aka Princess Rose) has overslept by about 900 years

## Stage review

"Sleeping Beauty Wakes" plays at 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays through May 13, with additional shows at 8 p.m. April 27, May 4 and May 8-11, at the Kirk Douglas Theatre, 9820 Washington Blvd., Culver City. Tickets are \$20-\$50. Information: 213-628-2772 or [www.centertheatregroup.org](http://www.centertheatregroup.org).

— snoozing through the arrival of her first eligible prince, who turned out to be more smarmy than charming.

Adrift in dream limbo (along with fellow snoozers Snow White and Rip Van Winkle), Rose (the lovely Alexandria Wailes) finds herself enrolled in a sleep disorder clinic. She's brought there by her magically sustained father, the King (played by Clinton Derricks-Carroll).

— She shares the ward with a gaggle of sleep sufferers. There's the droopy-eyed insomniac (Kevin Early), a get-up-and-go sleepwalker (Troy Kotsur), a victim of nightmares (Erika Amato) and an itchy-twitchy woman plagued by Restless Leg Syndrome (Chris-

ta Manztke). They're all watched over by a narcoleptic trucker-turned-candy striper (Russell Harvard) and the clinic's ramrod-stern director (Deanne Bray).

With the exception of Rose and her father, all of the actors play multiple parts as the action ping-pongs between Rose's childhood fairy-tale kingdom, the land of nod and the present. The live musical accompaniment (as well as the voices for several of the nonspeaking performers) is provided by the members of GrooveLily, led by Vigoda, who plays a mean electric violin.

In their effort to protect and shield their only daughter from her fairy-tale curse (remember the whole spinning wheel thing?), Rose's parents have inadvertently sown the seeds of her downfall. Because as Rose's teenage hormones begin to roar, all the Princess wants to do is party.

Her nemesis, the wicked fairy, is played with delicious glee by Bray, while her speaking and singing voice is provided with equal relish by Amato.

Ironically, Rose's arrival on the ward suddenly allows her bed-mates to sleep soundly and join her in her "once upon a time" dream state. But when Rose suddenly goes Code Blue, and the kiss of life is delivered (by Harvard), the act brings Beauty back to the

land of the living.

It's a plot device that's been used again and again, as the sleeper (a la Woody Allen) wakes to find herself a stranger in a strange land. But in the case of Rose, this Princess is hot to trot. She quickly hooks up with her kissing prince and escapes to explore a brave new world of shopping malls, parking lots, credit spending and wind-in-your-hair motorcycling. "I've never been in a parking lot," she exclaims in delight.

The show's consistently tuneful songs incorporate a variety of pop genres, from gentle ballads such as "Everything Changes But You," "Out of Harm's Way" and "Drifting," to the Isaac Hayes-style funk of "Wake Up Call for Love" and the rock-out beat of "Bring It On" and "Trouble." Through it all, the singing is first rate.

It's all a lot of fun, though not especially substantial. There's nothing "Wicked" about this show, nor is there anything adventurous enough to lead you "Into the Woods." But as directed and choreographed by Jeff Calhoun, with a clever production design by Tobin Ost (sets), Maggie Morgan (costumes) and Michael Gilliam (lighting), "Sleeping Beauty Wakes" is a wonderfully performed romp.

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