

# Reviews

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## "Beauty Wakes" is Pure Magic

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by James Sims

There is something magical afoot at the Kirk Douglas Theatre as a wondrously imaginative collaboration between Deaf West Theatre and the Center Theatre Group is making a World Premiere in the form of *Sleeping Beauty Wakes, a New Musical Fable*.

When last together, both Deaf West and CTG delivered a multiple Tony Award-winning revival of *Big River*, and if their current efforts make a well-deserved move to Broadway, there is sure to be a wealth of accolades.

The innovative nature of a Deaf West production lies in their interpretation of standard talking plays into a weaving of sign language and speaking parts, which if not seen before, is a masterful work of art. Witnessing the conveyance of nearly all emotions through nothing more than expressions and signing is a play going delicacy.

Breaking down *Beauty Wakes* into its individual parts reveals three drastically different layers that each find a way to beautifully meld on stage into a seamless musical, including the sign language aspect along with a reworking of a familiar story and the drastically current nature of the musical score.

Everything old is new again in this modern imagining of the timeless fairytale story of a princess cursed to endless sleep until a prince awakens her slumber with a kiss, thanks to a clever book by Tony Award-winner [Rachel Sheinkin](#) (*The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*). Aside from updating the Mother Goose tale, now placing Beauty (Alexandria Wailes) in a sleep disorder clinic, the heroine no longer feels a connection with The Prince (Troy Kotsur), opting instead to wait for a truer love, in the form of a narcoleptic orderly (Russell Harvard).

Now here is where the story takes a slightly abstract turn, as the well-known fairytale is flashed back and forth through dream sequences from the slumbering princess, revealing that much of the familiar plot lines - specifically fairies bestowing gifts upon the newborn royalty, with a Bad Fairy (Deanne Bray) cursing the child to die from the prick of a spindle, only to have a final spell used to alter the wicked destiny from death to sleep - are kept in tact with a slight twist.

With Beauty having a shared romance with the Groundskeeper's Son (Harvard), the King (Clinton Derricks-Carroll) punishes these two lovers by keeping them apart. So upon slipping into a now nearly 900 year sleep, once Prince Charming makes his move, no longer are butterflies felt, rather Beauty refuses to awake, leading her father to magically remain youthful as long as his daughter is caught in the spell.





Flash to once upon a time finding itself smack in the middle of the less enchanting world of modern times. A sleeping clinic Director (Bray), conducting studies on various disorders, receives Beauty from her father who hopes something can finally be done about his daughter. In stumbles the Orderly who shares Beauty's infectious dreams of forbidden love with her long-dead lover, ultimately sharing an accidental kiss that revives the princess and causes a few conflicts in her wake.

Director-choreographer [Jeff Calhoun](#) ([Grey Gardens](#), [Big River](#)) is one of two genius aspects of *Beauty Wakes*, crafting a masterpiece of staged excellence, blending the split cast of deaf

and hearing actors into a stunning visual experience. With many of the speaking actors lending their voices to their deaf counterparts, it is astounding to witness the affecting performances each of the deaf actors exudes. These unheard thespians have the most to say, and rightfully so, are cast in the leading roles of Beauty, Clinic Director/Bad Fairy, Prince Charming and Orderly/Groundskeeper's Son.

As the title character, Wailes (*Big River*) is an angelic presence on stage, touching and detailed in her portrayal of a confused teenage princess longing for everything both modern and long ago worlds have to offer. Her performance, along with every deaf actor in *Beauty Wakes*, is amplified through sign more than any vocally projected act could hope to accomplish, and Wailes emerges as a leading star.

Picking up two roles, both love interests of Beauty, Harvard joins the rank of deaf actors transcending any perceived limitations due to a lack of speaking lines, capturing the heart of the newly created characters with ease. During a scene where the two lovebirds rekindle their timeless romance on a motorcycle ride, Harvard's ability to shine behind the stunning Wailes is a strong feat. Complimenting Harvard is the voice of Orderly/Groundskeeper's Son, [Brendan Milburn](#).



Bray and Kotsur round out the lead deaf roles, each adding a humorous touch to the production. Bray, performing double duty as Bad Fairy and the Clinic Director, is wickedly delicious as the reclusive evildoer who casts the disastrous spell on the unsuspecting newborn as a result of not receiving an invite to a royal celebration. Truly the diva of the show, Bray's voice is further brought to life by the sinfully fun singing of Erika Amato, who also picks up a role of her own as Night Terror Patient. Kotsur's Shaft-like take on Prince Charming is a groovy joy, as is the Prince's voice provided by [Kevin Earley](#).

In the unique position of both speaking and signing his way through *Beauty Wakes*, Derricks-Carroll (Dreamgirls) is the emotional backbone of the story, full of poignant moments, finding the meaning of true love through his daughter's eyes as he quickly fades into the cheated past.

If the Deaf West contribution to *Beauty Wakes* is not already enough of a reason to appreciate

this new play, the show's musical and lyrical wizards up the ante with a magic all their own. [Valerie Vigoda](#) and [Brendan Milburn](#), of the pop-rock trio Groovelily, once again inject their unique sounds into a theatrical production, having been successful in their recent musical foray with *Striking 12* (A musical look at Hans [Christian Anderson](#)'s fairytale "The Little Match Girl").

Tossing aside the well-worn traditional musical theatre formula, Vigoda and Milburn provide a fantastic argument to the necessity of revitalizing Broadway through its musical modernization. Though there are a small handful of current plays crafted in similar light – [Rent](#) and [Spring Awakening](#) quickly come to mind – in *Beauty Wakes*, the transformation is raised to a higher degree, giving a much needed jolt to the state of the overabundant standard fare currently on stage throughout New York.

With near futuristic instruments in hand, Vigoda and Milburn deliver a mesmerizing musical interpretation, ranging from the R&B styling of "Wake Up Call For Love" – the comical song introducing the pompous Prince Charming – to the charming musical soliloquy in "Only a King" and a rock-infused bitchfest with the Bad Fairy's "Uninvited." If any musical deserved a cast recording, *Beauty Wakes* is just the one to be immortalized with an album pressing.



Stage designs befit a line the Clinic Director utters in describing the senses surrounding a coma revival, where a lack of color is "typical before a coma, everything going to white." [Tobin Ost](#) and [Michael Gilliam](#), as set and light designers, respectively, have created a clinically white palate for the fairytale dreamscapes to vibrantly breakthrough the colorless current day setting.

The catwalk perched above the stage did lead to a few stumbling moments as the actors attempted to swing open a few gates, though along with Maggie Morgan's whimsical costumes, best represented by Bad Fairy's Disney-like robes, the visual charm of *Beauty Wakes*

compliments the already stellar production.

The only foreseeable revisions necessary for an East Coast transplant reside in the book's complexity. With so much alteration to the beloved tale, there are moments when it becomes quite a lot to ask audiences to absorb. The inclusion of characters like Rip Van Winkle, Snow White and Urashima Taro are slightly confusing.

Mostly, there is nothing but accolades to sprinkle on this new musical, as *Beauty Wakes* is a must-see show of the year.

The world premiere production of *Sleeping Beauty Wakes* will play at the Kirk Douglas Theatre in Culver City through **May 20**. Ticket prices range from \$20-\$50 and can be purchased by calling 213-628-2772 or on-line at [www.CenterTheatreGroup.org](http://www.CenterTheatreGroup.org). The Kirk Douglas Theatre is located at 9820 Washington Boulevard in Culver City. The production is produced by special arrangement with East of Doheny.

**Photos by Craig Schwartz.**

# Musical awakening

By Evan Henerson  
Theater Writer

## Rock band GrooveLily takes center stage for now

The director of "Sleeping Beauty Wakes" is a veteran stage hand with Broadway experience. Its playwright won a Tony. The two co-presenting theater companies — Center Theatre Group and Deaf West Theatre — certainly know what playmaking is all about.

In fact, the members of the creative team who are still a bit green to this genre are — somewhat ironically — the composers.

This stands to reason. In their other incarnation, composer/lyricists Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda are two-thirds of the rock band GrooveLily. And right now, the theater world seems to want GrooveLily more than the music industry.

"We stopped trying to get a record deal," says Milburn, the band's keyboardist. "And then we got a record deal from a theatrical label."

The band had already been scaling back on its concerts and steadily moving into the world of live theater. A GrooveLily-scored musical — like its maiden effort, "Striking 12" — also comes with the performers on stage, incorporated into the action.

So it's come to pass that the Brooklyn-based Milburn and Vigoda have been rehearsing in L.A. since February, boning up on both their American Sign Language and their acting. "Sleeping Beauty Wakes" opens at the Kirk Douglas Theatre this weekend.

As far as "Beauty Wakes" director Jeff Calhoun is concerned, the pop/rock world's temporary loss is live theater's gain.

"(Milburn and Vigoda's) is not a sound we've heard in the theater before. I'm not smart enough to be able to name it, but they're unique, and finding a unique voice like this is something to celebrate," Calhoun says.

### Wearing lots of hats

The husband and wife composers — parents to an 18-month-old son, Mose, as well as bandmates — fully intend to celebrate ... once the lyrics and arrangements are all hammered out, once their "Beauty Wakes" roles are learned. It's a lot of work wearing creator and player hats, but Vigoda and Milburn aren't exactly griping.

"There's so much more you



GrooveLily — Shannon Ford, left, Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda — perform in the world premiere of "Sleeping Beauty Wakes," through May 13 at the Kirk Douglas Theatre.

can do when you're liberated from just telling your own story," Vigoda says. "Instead of talking about your own breakup or boyfriends, suddenly you're telling the story of 'Sleeping Beauty' or Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Little Match Girl.' There's just a whole world out there of more exciting work."

"Match Girl" was the basis for "Striking 12," the band's first attempt at concertized storytelling written with Rachel Sheinkin, the writer of "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee." GrooveLily broke out a 45-minute showcase version of the three-person musical in 2004 at the National Alliance for Musical Theatre.

With Milburn, Vigoda and drummer Gene Lewin doubling as both the musicians and the only performers, the show was one of the hits of the festival. When a full production finally reached New York last year, The New York Times' Charles Isherwood lauded "Striking 12" and "Spring Awakening" composer Duncan Sheik for "inspir-

ing hope that musical theater, long considered to be on life support, may yet make a recovery fueled by musical transfusions from the more eclectic players in the pop and rock spheres."

### Like a fairy tale

Former Deaf West managing director Bill O'Brien saw "Striking 12" at the NAMT, and broached the idea of a collaboration between Deaf West and GrooveLily with the band producing songs that the deaf and partially deaf actors would perform.

"We thought it would be interesting if something ever came of it, but we never expected it to," says Milburn. "Then, in late 2005, Deaf West had gotten this huge grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and they had to have something to present in front of a paying audience at the end of June 2006."

O'Brien's directive: Base the new work on a fairy tale and have the band members mix with deaf and partially deaf

### SLEEPING BEAUTY WAKES

Where: Kirk Douglas Theatre, 9820 Washington Blvd., Culver City.  
When: 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday, 2 and 7 p.m. Sunday; through May 13.  
Some weeknight performances. Call for exact schedule.  
Tickets: \$20 to \$50. (213) 628-2772  
www.centertheatregroup.org.

actors, GrooveLily spitballed a modern-day take on "Rumpelstiltskin," but book writer Sheinkin suggested "Sleeping Beauty" set in a present-day sleep-disorders clinic instead.

The workshoped version played Deaf West's small North Hollywood theater. At that point, "Beauty Wakes" was rough around the edges but well-received, and a full commission followed.

Coming off a conceptual staging of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in New Jersey (the band recently cut a concept album from the production), Vigoda says GrooveLily appears to be establishing a pattern "of doing shows that we can perform in our pajamas."

### Return to roots

For Milburn, moving into theater is actually something of a full-circle return. Graduating from Pomona College, he attended graduate school at New York University's Musical Theater Writing Program (a couple of years ahead of eventual writing partner Sheinkin). Leaving graduate school and finding himself daunted by the New York musical theater scene, Milburn instead hooked up with a girl rock band fronted by Vigoda.

He had caught their act and was smitten by both the music and the violinist/lead singer, Vigoda. One slight obstacle stood in the way.

"She thought I was gay," Milburn says of Vigoda. "I was all into musical theater, I came from San Francisco, this sensitive new-age guy. So it took a while to sort of progress past that."

"Even before we started dating, we were writing lyrics together," adds Vigoda. "One of our first misunderstandings was when he asked me out for coffee. I thought, 'Is this a date?' He said, 'I want to talk you out for coffee and talk about songwriting.' He really did, and it was all business. We talked about songwriting, we got to know each other, and that's the way we still are."

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LOS ANGELES

## *Sleeping Beauty Wakes*

Reviewed By: Jonas Schwartz



Russell Harvard and Alexandria Wailes  
in *Sleeping Beauty Wakes*  
(© Craig Schwartz)

*Sleeping Beauty Wakes*, the new co-production by Deaf West Theater and the Center Theater Group, is neither a conventional play nor a musical. It is however, a true theatrical experience -- a work of art, talent, and humor in which the combination of deaf and speaking actors feels completely organic.

The book, by Tony Award winner Rachel Sheinkin, is derived in part from the classic fairy tale. Princess Rose (enacted and signed by Alexandria Wailes, voiced and sung by Valerie Vigoda) has been born with a curse over her head: A spiteful fairy (Deanne Bray, voiced and sung by Erika Amato), furious that she had not been deemed pretty enough to be invited to

Rose's christening, commands that a poisonous spindle will kill the princess.

So Rose grows up in a metaphorical cage, protected from any danger, only to become rebellious. Despite her parents' efforts, she is drawn to the spindle and eventually falls into a great sleep for 1,000 years.

Centuries later, we meet a frosty doctor (Bray and Amato again) who runs a sleep clinic with a narcoleptic orderly (Russell Harvard, voiced and sung by Brendan Milburn). Rose's father (Clinton Derricks-Carroll), who has traded powers and finances to stay alive long enough to see his daughter awaken, brings Rose to the clinic. The other patients, who all suffer from forms of sleep deprivation, commonly dream Rose's tale. When she suddenly awakes, they find their own reprieve lifted, and their maladies return. Everyone begins to search for a way to even the scales.

Sheinkin, who won the Tony for *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, deals with some very provocative themes here -- for example, how children tempt death, and how we rely on others to define and cure us rather than looking within ourselves for the answer.

The husband and wife team of Milburn and Vigoda, best known as part of the pop group Groovelily, has written a delightful score, one particularly influenced by country rock and the sounds of the 1970s. Their lyrics are crafty, and their songs charmingly melodic. The anthem "Trouble," sung by Rose and the Groundskeeper's son (also played by Harvard and voiced and sung by Milburn), states the recklessness of youth. Meanwhile, Rose and her modern beau, the orderly, sing "You Make Me Feel Awake," a ballad reminiscent of such Disney neo-classics as "A Whole New World" and "Beauty and the Beast." The pair also deftly play their own instruments on stage. (Vigoda is especially sexy on the electric violin.)

Bray and Amato work very well together, often to hilarious effect. During their villainous number "Uninvited," you forget that one woman is singing while the other is signing. Their most

delectable song, "The Wheel Goes Round," pretends to be an instruction for the spinning wheel but is really a recipe for murder, as the fairy seduces Rose to her death.

As the young lovers, Harvard and Wailes nicely embody youthful arrogance and innocent passion. Derricks-Carroll is the show's soul as the King, a man who has given away his livelihood to protect his daughter. The four sleep-deprived patients, who act as sort of a Greek chorus, also have great moments. Kevin Earley invokes the boy bands of the 1960s with the pastiche-like "Still Small Hours," while both Christia Manztke and Troy Kotsur (the latter voiced by drummer Shannon Ford) have impeccable comic timing.

Much of the credit for the show's success belongs to director Jeff Calhoun, who helmed Deaf West's hit revival of *Big River*. He clearly and repeatedly focuses on the show's major theme, the convergence of opposites. We hear it musically in "Can You Cure Me," which mixes rap and country music; and we see it in the set, such as when the high school boys' bathroom opens up to a colorful stained-glass scrim.

We see opposites everywhere: the sleeping and the wide awake, traditional instruments and modern instruments, the welcomed and the uninvited, the haves and the have nots, and, most clearly, deaf performers and hearing/speaking actors.

Despite Calhoun's skill as a choreographer, it's not surprising that *Sleeping Beauty Wakes* contains no real dancing, since the sign language acts as choreography. The performers are all very lyrical, and their movements never seem perfunctory. Indeed, they help create a world -- a most welcome one -- that is rarely seen in the theater.

<http://www.theatermania.com/content/news.cfm/story/10476>

# '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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# DAILY VARIETY

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TUESDAY, APRIL 10, 2007

## Sleeping Beauty Wakes

(Kirk Douglas Theater; 317 seats; \$50 top)

A Center Theater Group and Deaf West Theater presentation of a musical fable in two acts with book by Rachel Sheinkin, music and lyrics by Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda. Directed and choreographed by Jeff Calhoun. Set design, Tobin Ost; costumes, Maggie Morgan; lighting, Michael Gilliam; sound, Eric Snodgrass; production stage manager, William Coiner. Opened, reviewed April 7, 2007. Runs through May 13. Running time: 2 HOURS, 20 MIN.

Beauty/

Princess Rose ..... Alexandria Wailes  
Groundskeeper's Son,

Orderly ..... Russell Harvard

King ..... Clinton Derricks-Carroll

Queen ..... Christia Mantzke

Bad Fairy ..... Deanne Bray

With: Erika Amato, Kevin Earley, Shannon Ford, Troy Kotsur, Brendan Milburn, Valerie Vigoda.

By BOB VERINI

umerous characters in "Sleeping Beauty Wakes," as per Deaf West Theater's company style, are acted and signed by one thesp while being spoken and sung by another. The melding of performances is seamless; it's the narrative that suffers from a split-personality disorder. Show resembles children's theater, but dual plotlines uneasily



Alexandria Wailes as the princess and Russell Harvard as her beau star in "Sleeping Beauty Wakes" at the Kirk Douglas Theater.

coexist to produce an overlong fairy tale too confusingly structured and diffuse for kids' attention. Pleasures are to be found in the fusion of sign language and the spoken or sung word, and in Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda's score, itself an appealing fusion of pop, rock and jazz.

Librettist Rachel Sheinkin ("The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee") initially offers the

Sleeping Beauty tale straight up with a twist. All the Charles Perrault ingredients are here: princess's christening; uninvited Bad Fairy (a sultry, understated turn by Faye Dunaway look-alike Deanne Bray and superb singing partner Erika Amato); cursed spindle; pricked finger; hundred-year snooze.

Twist is that one look at her blue-velvet-wearing, Elvis-impersonating

Turn to page 10

## Sleeping Beauty Wakes

*Continued from page 9*

Prince (Troy Kotsur) puts Beauty (Alexandria Wailes, more than meriting the moniker) out again for the better part of a millennium, only to wake in the present day with disorientation similar to Robert De Niro's in "Awakenings." Prepped by the encyclopedia and back issues of *People*, she explores the 21st century with her beloved (an utterly winning Russell Harvard), the castle's erstwhile gardener reincarnated as a hospital Candy Striper.

Ah yes, that hospital. Equal time is allotted to the fantasy and the here-and-now, but the stories are seriously unbalanced. As long as the show sticks to the Sleeping Beauty theme and variations, it's captivating and funny.

But once the King (Clinton Derricks-Carroll) transports his still-buzzsawing daughter to an unaccountably American sleep-disorder clinic, a quartet of sufferers make us suffer through indistinctly written, overacted roles and tedious subplots involving their ongoing ailments. And Bray's clinic director is neither villainous nor sympathetic; the character is a cipher.

Judiciously pruning these scenes would relieve the exhausting running time and allow themes of the dream-state of life and the timelessness of true love to come through more clearly.

Plot missteps aside, there's something primal and deeply satisfying about the Deaf West acting style, featuring nonstop signing from all, while voices emanate unpredictably, sometimes from off-stage and other times from within the ensemble. The result is a uniquely collective act of storytelling. Scenes that would play to unexceptional effect in a conventional production, such as the latenight motorcycle ride of Beauty and her beau, become hypnotically affecting in this context.

Scene transitions aren't yet crisp, but in his third company show, helmer Jeff Calhoun has become a master orchestrator of singing, signing, speaking and dance. Show boasts no American Sign Language-related coup like the sudden cessation of accompaniment during "Waiting for the Light

to Shine" in the company's "Big River," but Calhoun takes full advantage of the expressive power of signing to music.

When Derricks-Carroll bemoans the limits of his power in "Only a King," or Wailes and Harvard enact a moonlight swim in "Drifting," their gestures transcend language to become choreography. It's lovely stuff.

Husband-and-wife composers Milburn and Vigoda, two-thirds of the performing trio "Groovelily," apply a fine, uncluttered lyric sense to their beguiling melodies. Their specialty is character songs: Bray and Amato out-wicked "Wicked" in just two menacing numbers, "Uninvited" and "Wheel Goes Round." Stand-alone ballads, especially "Everything Changes but You" and "You Make Me Feel Awake," have commercial potential, while serving the love story perfectly.

If the score mostly impresses as a concept album (a two-CD set at that, given 26 songs and reprises), it's because of a certain sameness that creeps in eventually, as well as a tendency for songs simply to end without a proper musical-comedy button. But as an album, it would be worth playing over and over, and keyboardist Milburn and electric violinist Vigoda — who voice the romantic leads and accompany the cast with percussionist-thesp Shannon Ford — should remain on the radar as both scribes and performers.

Tobin Ost's two-tiered unit set undercuts shifts between legend and contempo life; despite magic provided by Michael Gilliam's lighting and projections, the environment is too modern and metallic to support the fairy-tale elements. Rickety-looking castled stairs fail to alter the stage space materially in their many lateral moves, rising to a catwalk whose gates, flopping open carelessly, make one nervous for Vigoda up there singing, acting and fiddling away.

Maggie Morgan has designed a triumphant velvet-and-feathers cape for the Bad Fairy, and Wailes is stunning in a series of white frocks, but the modern clothes seem unnecessarily cheap and drab. The King's rumpled gold shirt makes him look like a dealer in a cheesy casino; over 1,000 years, couldn't he have come across an iron?

REVIEW

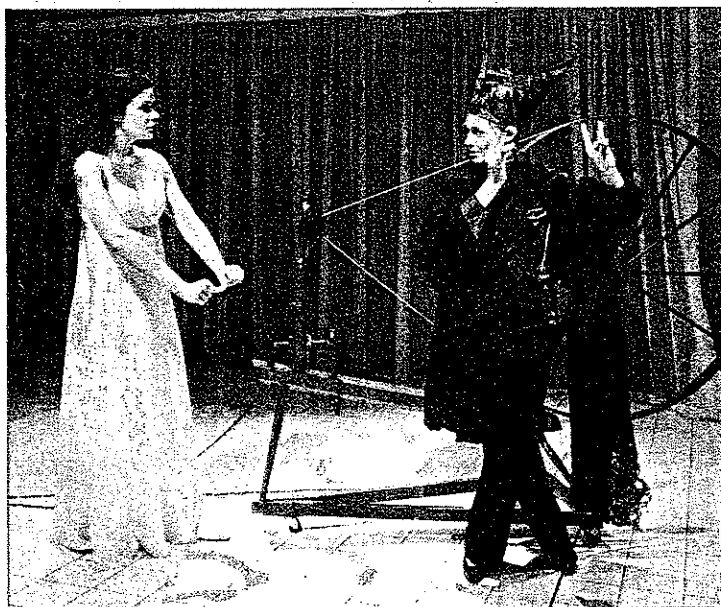
# Charming take on a standard

New 'Sleeping Beauty' combines deaf, hearing actors in winning blend of catchy music, deft storytelling.

By PAUL HODGINS  
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

What should Sleeping Beauty do if Prince Charming is neither princely nor charming? Probably best to snooze right through the kiss, dontcha think?

That's exactly what happens in "Sleeping Beauty Wakes," an inventive and highly entertaining new take on the Sleeping Beauty fable that made its debut Saturday at the Kirk Douglas Theatre in Culver City. Rachel Sheinkin (book) and Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda (music and lyrics) have borrowed from far and wide to recast the story as a pancultural, post-modern romance with plenty of twists



CRAIG SCHWARTZ

**BAD COMPANY:** Alexandria Wailes, left, is Sleeping Beauty, who this time sleeps for a really, really long time. Deanne Bray is the Bad Fairy in the Deaf West Theatre musical.

and 21st-century sociocultural commentary stirred into the stew.

The result can seem a little too self-consciously cute and clever at times, but Sheinkin knows how to write a morality

tale that charms as much as it edifies and plays just as well to adults as to kids. And the songs, performed by their creators along with percussionist Shannon Ford and some strong singers in the eight-

## 'Sleeping Beauty Wakes'

**Where:** Kirk Douglas Theatre, 9820 Washington Blvd., Culver City

• **When:** Through May 13. 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays

• **How much:** \$20-\$50

• **Availability:** Good

• **Length:** 2 hours, 15 minutes

• **Suitability:** Older children and adults

• **Call:** 213-628-2772

• **Online:** [www.CenterTheatreGroup.org](http://www.CenterTheatreGroup.org)

member cast, are almost all hummable winners.

"Sleeping Beauty Wakes" is a co-production of Center Theatre Group and North Hollywood's Deaf West Theatre. Like other Deaf West musicals (including its Tony-winning revival of "Big River"), this one combines deaf and hearing actors in a multilayered musical-theater landscape that includes performers who sing, speak and sign and others who only sign - their character's

SEE 'BEAUTY' • PAGE 4

### MORE ONLINE

To read an interview with the creative team behind "Sleeping Beauty Wakes," go to [ocregister.com/entertainment/arts](http://ocregister.com/entertainment/arts)

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# 'BEAUTY'

FROM PAGE 3

voices are provided by either another performer or one of the onstage musicians. This approach sounds complicated, but thanks to some seamless craftsmanship, you accept its brand of theatrical reality surprisingly quickly.

Alexandria Wailes plays the princess whose endless slumber party is being watched over by the only person left awake in her kingdom - the groundskeeper's son (Russell Harvard).

When the prince arrives to give her the magic smack, he's played as a preening narcissist by Troy Kotsur. His big entrance number, "Wake Up Call For Love," is straight out of the Barry White School of Musical Seduction, and Kotsur provides the rude body language to match.

The prince's lip-lock awakens everybody except the princess. She's as unimpressed as we are.

And so she continues to sleep - and sleep and sleeeeeeep - right up to the present. She's brought to a sleep-disorder clinic, where a collection of kooky, dysfunctional snoozers seeks a cure for their problems.

At first, the clinic's no-nonsense director (Deanne Bray) has little patience for the elderly man who brings Sleeping Beauty through her doors. She's a scientist - not the kind of person to buy a story about a 10-century-long magic spell cast by a bad fairy and told by someone who claims to be 1,050 years old.

But the young woman has an undeniable effect on the clinic's other patients. They all sleep soundly now, dreaming similar dreams of a faraway kingdom filled with fairies and princesses and magic spells. And she's as irresistible as catnip to the clinic's orderly (Harvard), a young narcoleptic who finds her strangely familiar: ...



**REAWAKENED:** Alexandria Wailes and Russell Harvard go for a joy ride in "Sleeping Beauty Wakes."

CRAIG SCHWARTZ

Milburn and Vigoda, both members of the cult band GrooveLily, have a knack for infectiously tuneful songwriting, and their stylistic range is impressive. The princess' "glad to be awake" song, "Trouble," is catchy, naughty and up-tempo. They're just as good with achingly beautiful ballads, and their lyrics ("the seaweed will sway you to sleep in slow motion") can be hauntingly evocative.

Director/choreographer Jeff Calhoun, who steered Deaf West's "Big River" to Broadway success, has created a breezy, spare-looking production that relies more on our imagination than elaborate stagecraft for the story's far-flung locales.

Tobin Ost's set is little more than a tile-floored open space backed by a raised gallery for the story's many staircase entrances and exits. That focuses attention on Maggie Morgan's costumes, which are wonderfully whimsical when they need to be - the bad fairy looks like the scariest cartoon villainess Disney ever created. Such minimalism also means that details such as the brambles which surround Sleeping Beauty are merely hinted at with flowing, patterned fabric.

Kotsur is the most assured comic presence, but there are other standout performances. Bray's bad fairy is a fearsome creation, Harvard is a goofy but winning romantic match for Sleeping Beauty, and Christia Manztkke brings a loopy, Teri Garr-like sensibility to one of the clinic's dysfunctional sleepers, a sufferer of restless legs syndrome.

Milburn and Vigoda do yeoman's work as both onstage band members and singer-performers. They're aided by percussionist Shannon Ford, who's kept only slightly less busy than Milburn and Vigoda by the demands of story and score.

With luck, this "Beauty" will find its way to other venues - if not on Broadway, then perhaps to your kids' school auditorium (though given its length, complexity and the demands it makes of hearing and deaf performers, it'll be a lot trickier to stage than a theatrical version of "James and the Giant Peach").

Los Angeles Times

# CALENDAR

Tuesday, April 10, 2007

## THEATER REVIEW

### 'Beauty Wakes' to a new day

By CHARLES McNULTY  
Times Staff Writer

"Sleeping Beauty Wakes," the new musical fable that had its world premiere Saturday at the Kirk Douglas Theatre, breathes new life into a venue that deserves more of this kind of adventurous undertaking.

Which isn't to say that this original musical collaboration between Center Theatre Group and Deaf West Theatre is a dream come true. Nor is it likely to match the success of "Big River," the Deaf West sensation that moved from the company's North Hollywood home to the Mark Taper Forum before going to Broadway, where it received several Tony nominations and a special award for excellence.

The current production, which has a book by Rachel Sheinkin (a Tony winner for "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee") and music and lyrics by Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda (of the indie rock band GrooveLily), is often enchanting. But it's also multi-

[See 'Sleeping,' Page E3]

# New twists to classic 'Sleeping Beauty'

['Sleeping,' from Page E1] layered to a fault.

Deaf West's customary practice of casting deaf and hearing actors side by side is taken to new and vertiginous heights. While some cast members are voicing and others are signing, still others are playing instruments — while singing, voicing or signing as well. It's not only the deaf actors who are signing and having someone speak their parts, it's some of the hearing actors too. To complicate matters further, microphones make it exceedingly difficult to figure out where voices are coming from. This may be intentional, but to the uninitiated it can seem like a dubbed foreign movie.

Amid all this frenetic activity, the double-barreled narrative freely blends the once-upon-a-time and modern worlds together. The beauty of fairy tales lies in their deceptive simplicity, but this contemporary handling is knotty in the extreme.

Yet the imaginative ambition is so impressive and Jeff Calhoun's direction so tenderly effervescent it's hard not to smile as you watch this somnolent princess rise from her 900-year-long slumber to find herself in a state-of-the-art sleep clinic with a bunch of strung-out insomniacs who have been collectively dreaming her story whenever they can get a little shut-eye.

The two shows that seem to be the parents of Sheinkin's cute if cumbersome book are Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's "Into the Woods" and William Finn and Lapine's "A New Brain." Those works may be pitched more explicitly to adults than "Sleeping Beauty Wakes," but their influence is palpable. And they deserve to be mentioned alongside "Big River," a show that has raised the status of the "sign language theater musical," as Deaf West has termed its creations.

This pioneering genre integrates the unique expressive-



LAWRENCE K. HO Los Angeles Times

**MUSICAL:** *Rose (Alexandria Watles) falls for the Groundskeeper's Son (Russell Harvard) in the updated fairy tale.*

ness of deaf culture into mainstream musical theater. Calhoun, who earned a Tony nomination for "Big River," has been deservedly praised for his contribution to the form and continues to push for innovation and aesthetic excellence.

Still, it would be limiting to appreciate these productions exclusively in this context. In touch with the wide tradition of the American musical, "Sleeping Beauty Wakes" is a lovely theatrical tumble that defies categories. One doesn't have to be fluent in sign language (or especially interested in theater that incorporates it) to enjoy this ride, just as one needn't be a kid to delight in fairy tales. All that's required is a willingness to go on a fantastic journey. This — not your auditory level — is the dividing line.

The story of the snoozing teen who's eventually roused from the evil spell she's under by a princely peck on the cheek has enthralled readers for ages. In "The Uses of Enchantment," the enduring study of the way fairy tales speak to children, Bruno Bettelheim says "Sleeping Beauty" demonstrates the basic lesson that "despite all attempts

by Deanne Bray and voiced and sung by Erika Amato), who's still furious at not being invited to the girl's christening. Their tyrannical coddling of Rose, however, leads indirectly to the fulfillment of their worst fears. Not only does she want to run off with the gardener, but she has also come upon an outlawed spindle that, when it pricks her finger, spells lights out for a near eternity.

Sheinkin ups the ante by connecting Rose's awakening in the sleep clinic to the mortality of her father (Clinton Derrick-Carroll), who has patiently stuck by her all these centuries — losing his royal status and having to put up with the indignity of questions about his health insurance. Strangely, the other patients are also negatively affected by Rose's revival, which happens when an orderly (played by Harvard and voiced by Milburn) wakes her with a kiss. Curiously, he looks exactly like the Groundskeeper's Son, whom she always preferred to Prince Charming (played by Troy Kotsur and voiced and sung by Kevin Earley). Many of the figures from her past have a double in the clinic, and these poor patients are unable to catch a wink once she arises to romantic fulfillment and a potential job at White Castle.

The sprightly plot grows increasingly convoluted. Given the relentless shifting between past and present, Sheinkin should have streamlined some of her bright ideas. Perhaps then her interpretation would have achieved a more satisfying emotional focus. But don't let these cavils put you off. There's more than enough pleasure to compensate, especially in the freshly hypnotic way Milburn and Vigoda combine rock 'n' roll, country and R&B. Even if you occasionally find the story sketchy, there's always something about Sleeping Beauty that won't let your unconscious rest.

charles.mcintuly@latimes.com

## 'Sleeping Beauty Wakes'

Where: Kirk Douglas Theatre, 9820 Washington Blvd., Culver City

When: 2 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays. Call for exceptions

Ends: May 13

Price: \$20 to \$50

Contact: (213) 628-2772 or centertheatregroup.org

Running Time: 2 hours, 20 minutes

on the part of parents to prevent their child's sexual awakening, it will take place nonetheless."

Rose, the aptly named title character (movingly played by Alexandria Watles and voiced by Vigoda, who accompanies on electric violin), has fallen hard for the Groundskeeper's Son (played by the appealing Russell Harvard and voiced and sung by Milburn, who multitasks on keyboard). Her parents are fearful of the curse that has been placed on her by the Bad Fairy (played



Suitor Russell Harvard charms slumbering princess Alexandria Wailes.

## 'Sleeping Beauty Wakes'

Deaf West Theatre's "Sleeping Beauty Wakes" is a beguiling tour de force that looks at love, sleep and time by setting the familiar fairy tale in an innovative performing context: Four of the main performers, including Beauty, are deaf and have their voices supplied by other performers or by one of three onstage musicians.

The result is a brilliant entertainment in three dimensions, with constantly changing centers of focus often unrelated to where they would be in a conventional production. Because the actor doing the acting is not always doing the singing, and because everyone onstage is signing when they are singing or speaking, it takes a while for the initial disorientation and dazzle to wear off.

But in no time at all, the audience becomes immersed in Jeff Calhoun's richly choreographed chaos. Free to enjoy without barrier a series of extraordinary performances, and certain that they are hearing each person, singing or not, directly from their heart.

The imaginative book by

**theater**

BY  
LAURENCE  
VITTES

**venue**  
Kirk Douglas  
Theatre, Culver City  
(Through May 13)

**the bottom line**  
The play awakes,  
dazzles and  
confuses the senses  
as if it were a  
musical comedy  
video game.

Rachel Sheinkin, who won a Tony for "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee," has fun with the characters and the two temporal settings in which they find themselves: Once upon a time and now. The music and lyrics by Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda, which is pure Broadway energy enhanced with a rich mix of influences beginning with faux medieval, also are lots of fun.

In a production so relentlessly demanding of the highest levels of

performing virtuosity and producing coordination, there can be no single star but only an entire galaxy. Alexandria Wailes plays Beauty with radiant, quicksilver perfection and seductive grace. As her royal parents, Clinton Derricks-Carroll and Christia Mantzke provide the endearingly misguided love that drives the story.

Performing in multiple roles, Russell Harvard brings a gangly Jimmy Stewart type of romantic charm to Beauty's suitor; Troy Kotsur brings a George Carlin

See "BEAUTY" on page 22

## 'Beauty'

Continued from page 14—

sort of goofiness to his pair of amorous adventurers; and Deanne Bray is exceptionally sympathetic both as a hard-boiled sleep clinic director who keeps wanting to melt and as a bad fairy. As a pair of insomniacs, Kevin Earley is irrepressible and adorable, and Erika Amato is beautiful and silvery-voiced.

Special mention must go to the three musicians-performers who constitute the onstage band, all of who also provide voices for various characters as well as for characters they play themselves. Keyboardist Milburn and violinist Vigoda singing the lovers are superb, while Shannon Ford, who does a mean Japanese fairy tale hero,

plays assorted drums, cymbals, woodblocks and Glockenspiels. How they can seamlessly keep track of what they are supposed to be singing, playing and acting at any given moment is beyond comprehension; that they do it so unobtrusively is a further miracle.

Every element, from costume design to sound and lighting, has that rare combination of thorough professionalism and deeply devoted love of art and craft that distinguishes the merely excellent from the unforgettable.

But please, for their next world premiere at the Kirk Douglas, let's have Deaf West Theatre turn their attention to a more serious topic. After all, a fairy tale can only stretch so far.

### SLEEPING BEAUTY WAKES

Produced by special arrangement with East of Doheny

**Credits:** Book: Rachel Sheinkin; Music-lyrics: Brendan Milburn, Valerie Vigoda; Director-choreographer: Jeff Calhoun; Set designer: Tobin Ost; Costume designer: Maggie Morgan; Lighting designer: Michael Gilliam; Sound designer: Eric Snodgrass; Casting: Bonnie Grisan; Production interpreter: Catherine Richardson Kirvitt. **Cast:** Beauty: Alexandria Wailes; Groundskeeper's Son (and others): Russell Harvard; King: Clinton Derricks-Carroll; Queen (and others): Christia Mantzke; The Prince (and others): Troy Kotsur; Director (and others): Deanne Bray; Night Terror Patient (and others): Erika Amato; Insomniac (and others): Kevin Earley. Musician-performers: Valerie Vigoda, Brendan Milburn, Shannon Ford.

# LOS ANGELES

by Sharon Perlmutter

## *Sleeping Beauty Wakes*

Perhaps the most innovative aspect of Deaf West Theatre's groundbreaking production of *Big River* was the way in which it paired hearing actors with deaf actors in related roles. When, for example, a slave (played by a deaf actress) signed a song while her mother (played by a hearing actress) sang it beside her, the issue of who was interpreting for whom was truly in the eye of the beholder.

No such parity is present in *Sleeping Beauty Wakes*, Deaf West's new musical, having its world premiere at the Kirk Douglas Theatre. The signing characters take center stage. When someone else is speaking for a signing character, the speaker is not playing a related part, but is simply playing the "Voice of" the signing character. (Indeed, at one point, Valerie Vigoda - a hearing performer who plays the voice of Sleeping Beauty - *signs* the role of Snow White while *someone else* provides the voice.)

By relegating the "voice of" performers to the wings (they're visible, but rarely share the same performance space as the signing performers), *Sleeping Beauty Wakes* asks its signing actors to carry the bulk of the visual elements of the performance. And it correspondingly asks its hearing audience members to stop trying to figure out where the voice is coming from, and just *watch*.

Happily, the performers are up to the task, providing a visually engaging production, even for the non-ASL speakers in the crowd. Alexandria Wailes is a feisty, playful Sleeping Beauty. You only have to watch the way she slowly sways her upper body when shaking a finger to know that *this* Beauty is a teenager who won't take any crap from anyone. But Wailes tempers Beauty's headstrong ways with a joyful smile that is instantly endearing. Also outstanding is Deanne Bray, whose signing as the Bad Fairy is absolutely magnetic. Bray dominates the stage in the Bad Fairy's rockin' evil number, "Uninvited"; her presence would captivate even in silence. And Troy Kotsur knocks 'em dead as the Prince who thinks he's much more Charming than he actually is.

Of course, it certainly doesn't hurt that Erika Amato is powering her way through the Bad Fairy's "Uninvited" on the vocals - or that Kevin Earley voices the Prince's smooth groove, "Wake Up Call For Love," with his very best Barry White. It is when *Sleeping Beauty Wakes* combines a solid character-driven song with a stellar signed performance *and* a complementary vocal that this show really hits the heights.

It doesn't happen quite as often as it should. While a great deal of the songs, by Groovelily's Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda, are musically varied and lyrically intelligent, some are undistinguished. Particularly unremarkable are the duets between Beauty and her true love. Unfortunately, many of the small songs that musicalize moments that are wholly unnecessary to the story (such as an adorable fast-paced comic number in which the palace servants change the diaper of an infant Beauty) are more memorable than some of the songs that are essential to it.

The book, by Rachel Sheinkin, also has problems. The story posits that Sleeping Beauty chose to stay asleep rather than marry the jerk of a prince whose kiss was intended to wake her. It then has Beauty remain asleep for 900 more years, until she is taken to a present-day sleep disorder clinic where she is ultimately awakened. Combining the traditional fairy tale with a modern day conclusion is cute, but Sheinkin needlessly complicates the story with subplots that serve only to confuse some of the younger audience members. ("Dad, what's narcolepsy?" was overheard at intermission.) Indeed, the show hasn't made a firm decision as to whether it is aimed at children or adults. Many of the show's crisp, smart lyrics will be lost on children, yet some of the show's characters (particularly the sleep clinic patients) are drawn so broadly, they can only truly survive in Children's Theatre.

The problems with *Sleeping Beauty Wakes* have nothing to do with its use of deaf and hearing performers. Instead, the creative team has to decide what the show is supposed to be, and pare it down accordingly - making a show that's worthy of the substantial talent gathered to perform it.

# Articles

Articles



## ***Sleeping Beauty Wakes* as New Musical Opens in L.A. April 7**

By Ernio Hernandez  
07 Apr 2007



Alexandria Wailes and Russell Harvard  
in *Sleeping Beauty Wakes*.  
Craig Schwartz

Following the success of *Big River*, Jeff Calhoun again teams with Deaf West Theatre for the new musical *Sleeping Beauty Wakes*, which officially opens April 7 in Los Angeles.

Center Theatre Group presents the co-production with Deaf West of the new musical that features a cast of deaf and hearing actors. The show began its world-premiere run March 31 at the Kirk Douglas Theatre and will play through May 13. Calhoun (*Bells Are Ringing*, *Grease*) directs and choreographs.

A new twist on the classic Grimm Brothers' fairy tale takes audiences "on a wildly theatrical journey set in parallel worlds: a fairy tale kingdom and a contemporary sleep-disorder clinic," an announcement explains. "In both worlds, a caring father learns the difference between protecting and smothering his beloved daughter while his daughter discovers the real costs of flirting with danger, the joy of living a fully conscious and conscientious life, and the meaning of true love."

Featuring a book by Tony Award winner Rachel Sheinkin (*The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*) and music by Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda — of the band GrooveLily (which also features Gene Lewin) — *Sleeping Beauty Wakes* reunites the trio who penned *Striking 12* (a holiday show based on "Little Match Girl" by Hans Christian Andersen) and *Wheelhouse* (the autobiographical tale set on GrooveLily's touring motor home).

The cast includes Erika Amato, Deanne Bray, Clinton Derricks-Carroll, Kevin Earley, Shannon Ford, Russell Harvard, Troy Kotsur, Christia Mantzke and Alexandria Wailes with creators Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda also taking part.

The design team for *Sleeping Beauty Wakes* features Tobin Ost (scenic), Maggie Morgan (costumes) and Michael Gilliam (lighting). The production stage manager is William Coiner.

CTG and Deaf West Theatre Company previously teamed on the 2002 presentation of Deaf West's *Big River*, which incorporated hearing and deaf actors singing and signing songs of the musical, at the Mark Taper Forum. The show moved to Broadway where it earned Tony Award Honors for Excellence and returned to Los Angeles on a national tour.

Next up at the Douglas Theatre, William Inge's *Come Back, Little Sheba* will receive a revival starring S. Epatha Merkerson (June 17-July 15).

Tickets for *Sleeping Beauty Wakes* at The Kirk Douglas Theatre, 9820 Washington Blvd. in Culver City, CA, can be purchased by calling CTG Audience Services at (213) 628-2772 or online at CenterTheatreGroup.org. For the deaf community call TDD (213) 680-4017.



Shannon Ford, Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda in the world premiere of *Sleeping Beauty Wakes*.

photo by Craig Schwartz

**Send questions and comments to the [Webmaster](#)  
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**Center Theatre Group and Deaf West Theatre Present**  
**“Sleeping Beauty Wakes”**  
**A New Musical**  
**by Brendan Milburn, Rachel Sheinkin and Valerie Vigoda**  
**Directed and Choreographed by Jeff Calhoun**  
**World Premiere**  
**At CTG’s Kirk Douglas Theatre in Culver City**

A delightful twist on a classic Grimm’s fairy tale is revealed in the new musical “Sleeping Beauty Wakes,” presented by Center Theatre Group and Deaf West Theatre at the Kirk Douglas Theatre, March 31 through May 13, 2007. Opening is set for April 7.

Created by Brendan Milburn, Rachel Sheinkin and Valerie Vigoda, and directed and choreographed by Jeff Calhoun, “Sleeping Beauty Wakes” will feature the indie pop/rock sensation GrooveLily onstage with both hearing and deaf actors in this loose adaptation of the tale of a beautiful young princess who, cursed by a spiteful fairy, pricks her finger on a spinning wheel needle on her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday and promptly falls asleep for a 100 years.

But is the heroine of “Sleeping Beauty Wakes” a fictional character from another time and place or is her story the product of fitful dreams at a real, modern sleep disorder clinic? This beauty seems to have a problem getting to sleep, not sleeping too much. But when sleep finally comes, her dreams take her and the audience on a journey to discover what it means to be truly awake.

Will insomnia deter the heroine from finding her role in life and her own true love? Audiences can rest assured. Even modern fairy tales know the value of Happily Ever Afters.

Brendan Milburn, singer and on drums, and Valerie Vigoda, singer and electric violinist, are members (with Gene Lewin, singer and on drums) of GrooveLily, a music group that, with their blend of folk, rock, jazz, classical music and pop, have a unique niche all of their own. Some of their CDs include “Little Light” and “Are We There Yet?”

Rachel Sheinkin received the Tony Award last year for the libretto of “The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee.” She previously penned the book for GrooveLily’s “Striking 12,” a holiday show based on “Little Match Girl” by Hans Christian Andersen, and “Wheelhouse,” GrooveLily’s autobiographical tale set on their touring motor home.

CTG and Deaf West Theatre Company first paired up in 2002 with the highly successful presentation at the Mark Taper Forum of Deaf West’s award-winning production of “Big River,” which was subsequently presented as a co-production to rave reviews and an extended run on Broadway. The cast received Tony Award Honors for Excellence in the Theatre and the production was nominated for Best Revival – Musical. “Big River” returned to Los Angeles on a national tour and was presented at CTG’s Ahmanson Theatre in 2004. Some of Deaf West’s other award-winning productions include Ovation Award winners “Oliver!” and “A Streetcar Named Desire.” Last fall, Deaf West co-produced with Pasadena Playhouse the world premiere of Stephen Sachs’ “Open Window.”



## ***Big River* and *Striking 12* Teams Combine for New Musical Take on "Sleeping Beauty"**

By *Ernio Hernandez*

24 Oct 2005

Deaf West Theatre and director Jeff Calhoun — the team behind the recent revival of *Big River* — will enlist *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* Tony Award winner Rachel Sheinkin and GrooveLily for an upcoming original musical.

Slated for spring of 2006, the new work will debut at the company's North Hollywood stage. Deaf West currently co-produces the world premiere of Stephen Sachs' *Open Window* with Pasadena Playhouse through Nov. 20 at the latter's home venue.

"This will be a 'Sleeping Beauty' where the prince's kiss fails to do the trick. Beauty continues to sleep through millennia, finally waking up in our time to find a shopping mall where her castle once stood," Sheinkin explains about the modern tale. "As Beauty struggles to fit into her new culture, we explore the disorientation of finding ourselves alive in this particular era, and the sometimes bewildering quest to be truly awake."

Calhoun (*Bells Are Ringing*, *Grease*), who directed and choreographed the Deaf West production of the American Sign Language adaptation of *Big River* and *Oliver!*, will direct. Brendan Milburn and Valerie Vigoda — of the band GrooveLily (with Gene Lewin) — will create the new musical with Sheinkin.

Sheinkin earned a 2005 Tony Award for her work on the *Spelling Bee* musical, currently running on Broadway. The librettist previously penned the book for GrooveLily's *Striking 12* — a holiday show based on "Little Match Girl" by Hans Christian Andersen — and *Wheelhouse* — the group's autobiographical tale set on their touring motor home. She also provided the libretto for the developing Joel Derfner' musical *Blood Drive: A Musical Triptych*.

For more information on Deaf West Theatre, located at 5112 Lankershim Blvd. in North Hollywood, California, visit [www.deafwest.org](http://www.deafwest.org).

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