



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

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'Beauty'

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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.