



Illinois Ballet brings classic to Civic Center

Story by THEO JEAN KENYON of the Journal Star • Illustration courtesy of EVA PFAFF

A fairy tale that has captured the imagination of audiences for centuries comes to the Peoria Civic Center Theater stage next weekend.

Illinois Ballet brings "Sleeping Beauty" to life at 7:30 p.m. Saturday in a dramatic production that showcases the ballet's own company plus several members of the National Ballet of Panama.

Dancing the title role will be Maria Eugenia Herrera, the Panamanian ballet's principal dancer, who last November was featured as Swanhilda in Illinois Ballet's production of "Coppelia." Dancing opposite Herrera once again will be Guillermo Levya, who was the male lead in "Coppelia."

The Panamanian dancers are in Peoria as part of an intercultural exchange of sorts. Next June, members of Illinois Ballet will head to Central America, where they will perform a version of the company's "Rock Ballet," featuring original choreography and contemporary music.

Long considered the greatest classical ballet of the 18th century, with its musical score by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky and choreography by the ballet master Marius Petipa, "Sleeping Beauty" has fascinated dancers and producers since its first

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Maria Eugenia Herrera, the principal dancer of the National Ballet of Panama who also is in her third season with Illinois Ballet, stars as Princess Aurora in next weekend's performance of "Sleeping Beauty" at the Peoria Civic Center.

Photo courtesy of Illinois Ballet



'Beautiful' ensemble

Here are the professional dancers who will be performing in "Sleeping Beauty" and other Illinois Ballet shows during the 2003-2004 season:

■ **Maria Eugenia Herrera** is a native of Panama and a graduate of the National Ballet of Panama, where she is now principal dancer. She has studied and danced throughout Latin America, and with a scholarship from Butler University, she traveled to St. Petersburg, Russia, where she studied with Marek Cholewa and Rossano Ruffo, among others. This is her third season with Illinois Ballet; she danced the title role of Swanilda in "Coppelia" last year.

■ **Guillermo Levya**, now in his second season with Illinois Ballet, trained with the Professional School of Arts in Camaguey, Cuba; danced professionally for 11 years with the Ballet de Camaguey as principal dancer, and spent three years with the Ballet de Monterrey in Mexico. He also has danced with the Joffrey Ballet of Chicago and the Lexington Ballet. He is now with the Lyric Opera of Chicago and also is a free-lance dancer and teacher.

■ **Elizabeth Curtin** of Kansas City, Mo., has a bachelor of fine arts degree from the University of Arizona. She has performed in the Four Cygnets from "Swan Lake," the balcony pas de deux from "Romeo and Juliet," the grand pas de deux from "Don Quixote," Aurora in "Sleeping Beauty" and as soloist in the ballets "Paquita," "Les Sylphides" and "Cinderella."

■ **Josh Ferchau** of Colorado is a graduate of Knox College in Galesburg with a bachelor of arts degree in political science and dance. Last year he performed with Illinois Ballet in "Coppelia," and the "Liebeslieder Waltzes" and with the company at Glen Oak Park with the Peoria Municipal Band.

■ **Nicole Hess** of Wilmington, Ohio,

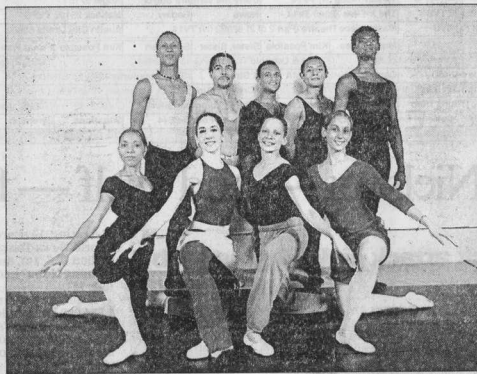


Photo courtesy of Illinois Ballet/Charles Harrison

Members of the National Ballet of Panama who will be featured in Illinois Ballet's production of "Sleeping Beauty" are, front from left, Martha E. Duran, Maria Eugenia Herrera, Alexa Gutierrez, Maria Elena Jimenez and, back, Alfonso Villarreal, Andres Nieto, Jose Alberto Villami, Edwin Saldil Espinosa Avila and Ivan Heredia Checa.

has a bachelor of arts degree in dance and a biology major from Mercyhurst College, where she was awarded dance merits and scholarships. Most recently she has trained and performed with Kentucky Ballet Theater. She also has performed in Erie Ballet Theater, Ballet de Jeunesse and the Mercyhurst Dancers. She has danced in "Sleeping Beauty," "Cinderella," "Giselle" and "Swan Lake," among others.

■ **Brenda Langan** is dancing her third season with Illinois Ballet after

choreographed by Frederick Ashton in England, and danced in the Isleworth Festival, with Doug Varone and Dancers in New York, the London Children's Ballet and the National Youth Ballet.

■ **Yuka Morita** is from Japan, where she trained at the Sumi Ballet Studio in Hokkaido. For the past three years, she has been at the Richmond Academy of Dance in Richmond, British Columbia. Among her previous roles have been the Sugar Plum Fairy in "The Nutcracker," the grand pas de deux from Act 2 of "Coppelia" and the Neopolitan and Black Swan pas de deux from "Swan Lake."

■ **Melissa Smith** of Winslow, Ariz., has trained with the Northern Arizona Preparatory School, Atlanta Ballet, Ballet Chicago, Ballet Tucson and with Mansur Kameitdinov, former artistic director of the Bolshoi Ballet. Recently she appeared as a guest artist in Ballet Tucson's production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

■ **Heather Thompson** of Lake Worth, Fla., graduated from Oklahoma City University with a bachelor of arts degree in dance performance. She has danced with the American Spirit Dance Company and its touring company, Pep Dancers and the Spirit of Grace Liturgical Dance Company.

■ **Elizabeth Troxer**, originally from Beaver, Pa., has returned to Peoria to dance with Mary Price Boday and the Illinois Ballet. From 1960 to 1999, she worked with Boday and the Peoria Ballet, where she was principal dancer and ballet mistress. Since 1999, she has been teaching and dancing in Flagstaff, Ariz., with the Northern Arizona University Preparatory School and the Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy. She has received a Solo Seal Award, the highest dance award presented by the Royal Academy of Dance.

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performance in 1890 in St. Petersburg, Russia. Mary Price Boday, artistic director and founder of Illinois Ballet, has restaged the ballet while maintaining Petipa's choreography with its wealth of classical ballet styles in courtly dances, romantic visions, grand processions and folk dances.

The principal dancers and corps de ballet provide an international flavor.

In addition to Herrera as Princess Aurora and the other representatives of the National Ballet of Panama, dancers in the production come from such diverse countries as Cuba, Japan and England.

Levya, dancing Prince Desire, trained with the Professional School of Arts in Camaguey, Cuba, and was the principal dancer with the Ballet de Camaguey for 11 years. He also has danced with the Ballet de Monterrey in Mexico, the Joffrey Ballet of Chicago and currently is with the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Yuka Morita of Japan, who trained at the Sumi Ballet Studio in Hokkaido and for the past three years in British Columbia, will dance several roles in the ballet, including Princess Aurora during two Friday morning performances for Peoria-area students and retirement home residents.

And Nicole Miller, who's from Pyrford, Surrey, England, is in her first season with Illinois Ballet. In England she has performed in "Les Partineurs,"

the Isleworth Festival, the London Children's Ballet and the National Youth Ballet.

The ballet follows the traditional storyline of "Sleeping Beauty" starting with the prologue. Six fairy godmothers have been invited to the christening of the infant Aurora by her father, King Florestan (Everett Brandt), to bestow their gifts. A peal of thunder announces the arrival of an uninvited guest, the wicked witch Carabosse (Josh Ferchau), who promises everlasting sleep for the baby should she prick her finger. Carabosse's spell can't be reversed, but the Lilac Fairy (Elizabeth Troxer) is able to weaken it: If the worst should happen, Aurora will seem to die but in reality fall asleep for 100 years and then be awakened by a prince's kiss.

Act One opens on the court celebrating Aurora's coming of age, and four young princes have come to seek her hand in marriage. She dances with them in turn in a celebrated "Rose Adagio," in which each prince offers her roses.

But Aurora is intrigued by an old woman who holds out a spindle, and Aurora dances with it until she sees she has pricked her finger, then dances on in a delirium until she falls to the ground. The old woman — Carabosse in disguise — laughs as her spell of doom takes effect. When the Lilac Fairy arrives, she waves her wand and the whole court falls into its 100-year sleep.

with a kiss.

The final act offers a series of dances to celebrate the wedding of Aurora and her Prince.

The ballet also includes various ensemble dances, including one with rems featuring the Diamond Fairy (Yuka Morita), Sapphire Fairy (Brenda Langan), Silver Fairy (Liz Curtin) and Gold Fairy (Nicole Hess). "Flowers of the Castle," with choreography by Sara Yarborough Smith, will be danced by the ballet's Apprentice School Company.

While the special magic of Tchaikovsky's music for "Sleeping Beauty" has been called the grandest, fullest and finest achievement of classical ballet, it was not the first staging of this timeless story.

The earliest known was an 1815 production at the Paris Opera by Pierre Gardel with music by Carafa. "La Belle au Bois Dormant" was again staged in 1825 at the Paris Opera with music by Carafa and choreography by Pierre Gardel.

Other early productions were in 1829, also at the Paris Opera, with music by Ferdinand Herold and choreography by Jean Pierre Aumer, and in 1840 at the Drury Lane Theatre in London, where the ballet was danced to Herold's music with choreography by Anatole Petit based on Aumer.

But it was Tchaikovsky, charmed by the story when a libretto was sent to him in 1888, who wrote the music that is still unforgettable and the basis for Petipa's choreography. For his ballet, Tchaikovsky received 3,000 rubles and a bonus of 2,000 more for having created such an excellent score.

'Sleeping Beauty'

What: Full-length ballet presented by Illinois Ballet that tells the classic story of a princess put to sleep by a wicked witch and 100 years later awakened by a prince's kiss, featuring music by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky and choreography by Marius Petipa. Starring Maria Eugenia Herrera as Princess Aurora and Guillermo Levya as the Prince; directed by Mary Price Boday with lighting design by technical director Richard Weil.

When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday. The ballet also is being performed for groups of students and retirement home residents at 9:30 a.m. and noon Friday.

Where: Peoria Civic Center Theater.

Tickets: Saturday night: \$23/box; \$20/main floor; \$18/first balcony; \$15/second balcony; seniors and children 12 and younger 10 percent off listed price. Call 673-3200. For tickets for Friday school and retirement home group performances, which cost \$5 apiece or \$1 for Title I students, call 383-2875.

Poster auction

The artwork featured on Illinois Ballet's "Sleeping Beauty" poster and on the cover of this section was created by Eva Pfaff, 19, of Germantown Hills, a sophomore at Illinois Central College. It will be auctioned off Saturday night, with proceeds benefiting Illinois Ballet. Silent bids will be accepted before the performance and during the second intermission, with the winning bid announced at the ballet's end. Pfaff also will be designing program covers for Illinois Ballet's upcoming productions of "The Song of Notre Dame" in December as well as "Flock Ballet" in the spring.

'Beauty' background

Here are some highlights in "Sleeping Beauty" history.

■ Premiered in St. Petersburg, Russia, on Jan. 14, 1890, the first successful ballet composed by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

■ It was the first ballet seen by a sickly 8-year-old child named Anna Pavlova — and that performance inspired her to become a dancer.

■ It was the first ballet ever seen by the great impresario Serge Diaghilev, and it also inspired many of Diaghilev's collaborators in the exciting new age of ballet ushered in by the Ballet Russes.

■ It was the first ballet in which the renowned George Balanchine appeared on the stage — as Cupid sitting in a gold cage.

■ It was the pinnacle of classical dance and the crowning achievement of choreographer Marius Petipa's career.

Left behind

Victor Corrales' name is listed in the "Sleeping Beauty" program as one of four Princes pursuing Princess Aurora, but whether he will be here is still uncertain.

Corrales was due to arrive Tuesday with nine other members of the National Ballet of Panama who are dancing in the Illinois Ballet production.

Instead Corrales, a Cuban member of the company, didn't get to board the plane.

Mary Price Boday, the artistic director of Illinois Ballet, said all the necessary paperwork had been filed and the \$100 visa fee paid, but the U.S. government did not permit Corrales to come with the others.

"I think it has something to do with 9-11," Boday said, but it remains unclear as to why entry was denied to the Cuban dancer.