

## **You can't say 'anything goes' in Ross Petty's *Sleeping Beauty*, but most things do | National Post Review**

By: Robert Cushman | December 15, 2016

This holiday season brings us the first Ross Petty pantomime, or “family musical,” without Ross Petty. Well, not altogether without. He does pop up at one point via video, in full Captain Hook garb and with full Captain Hook leer, asking – no, demanding – “Do you miss me?” In truth, we do. But more of that later. This *Sleeping Beauty*, recognizably a Petty production even without Petty on stage, has many things going for it, not least the way it spins out some theatrically unpromising material. As legends go, the original *Sleeping Beauty* is short on plot. Princess gets cursed, princess gets pricked, princess goes to sleep, prince awakens princess with kiss. That’s about all there is. Jeremy Diamond’s script ingeniously expands this with some good jokes, not all of them self-referential, and a second act set almost entirely in Dreamland, where things get positively metaphysical. We’re in Dreamland because that’s where the show’s Princess Rose goes during her prolonged enforced siesta. We first meet Rose at her christening where the wicked fairy Malignicent, furious at being denied an invite, puts a spell on her that obliges her royal family to keep her away from all sharp objects. We then flash forward 18 years, during which Rose has definitely grown though no-one else at the court has changed their looks or even their clothes, which by rights should be quite messy because cutlery has been banned throughout the realm.

Rose has been further protected by being enclosed in a rotating glass bubble. This is obviously frustrating for her but it gives her one heck of a first entrance. Anyway, the curse has nearly reached its expiry date so she leaves her bubble, rejoicing at being able to enjoy herself and do good in the world. Like all fairy-tale princesses these days, she’s a social justice warrior. But she isn’t quite safe yet and Malignicent, with devilish cunning, arranges for her nemesis to be the lad who loves her. He’s an aspiring musician, of troll parentage but not bad-looking if you don’t mind green hair, named Luke. Tricked into becoming a DJ, he turns up at the castle with his disc scratching equipment, and you can undoubtedly guess what happens. James Daly plays Luke, and his singing, dancing and clowning are awesome; also, when called for, is his acting. Talk about versatile: this performance, coming right after his searing dramatic work in *Master Harold and the Boys*, proclaims him the theatrical find of the year. AJ Bridel, late of *Kinky Boots*, is a sweet and spunky princess, especially notable for making an individual impression in some lively but standardized dance-routines (choreography by Julie Tomaino). By some elaborate plot twists possible only in Dreamland, the story is given a feminist twist (I think) by having the heroine be the one to wake the hero up. And they still live happily ever after, or at least through the curtain-call. The interpolated songs are mainly generic pop, apart from the witty opening number, a new Petty tradition, in which the Brothers Grimm in lederhosen clap hands, bump rears and promise that the ensuing story will be truly Grim (as opposed to deviously Disney). The brothers are Eddie Glen – who goes on to do his regular welcome turn as a reluctant bad guy – and

Laurie Murdoch – whose principal role is the King of Torrontonia, which, as I probably should have mentioned, is the place that Rose is princess of. The king is an endearing bumbler, but Lisa Horner’s acerbic queen keeps him in line. Professionals, the two of them.

The royal Torrontonians seem to reside in Casa Loma, as why shouldn’t they. The place has been attractively made up by Michael Gianfrancesco, who has also done a sumptuous job on the costumes, especially those for the sheep who do the choral work in Dreamland. The one person who has problems with the look of the place is the malevolent Malignicent, played by Hilary Farr who wants to re-design it, this being the motive for her malignity.

Also standing in for an absent standby is Paul Constable, who plays Sparklebum, “a fairy in training” and sister of the flirtatious Dame Plumbum, generally played by Dan Chameroy. He too has to compete with a patched-in appearance by his predecessor, and in his scripted moments he does little more than go through the motions. When he gets to ad-lib, with the trio of tots who troop on in time-honoured fashion from the audience, it’s a different story, and a very funny one. It isn’t quite true that in pantomime anything goes but here, under Tracey Flye’s direction, most things do.