

Eyes Wide Open: ABT's *Sleeping Beauty* Wakes up Ballet for the West Coast

By Katie Barnes

West Coast balletomanes are in for a treat this fall season when the Orange County Performing Arts Center plays host to a brand new production of a famous, much-loved ballet fairytale.

Following the world premiere in New York on June 1, this will be American Ballet Theater's (ABT) 19th appearance at The Center in Costa Mesa, one of the largest performing arts campuses in the US and home to the region's foremost music and arts organizations. Opening this production in the 3000-seat theater, Segerstrom Hall, ABT tours nationally each year since the company's founding in 1940.

The stunning international company cast includes lead artists Irena Dvoroenko, Paloma Herrera, Julie Kent, Gillian Murphy, Veronika Part, Xiomara Reyes, Michele Wiles, Maxim Beloserkovsky, Jose Manuel Carreño, Angel Corella, Herman Cornejo, Marcelo Gomes, David Hallberg and Ethan Stiefel.

Yet nothing is more exciting than the return to the stage of one of the greatest American dancers of the 20th century, prima ballerina, Gelsey Kirkland, after two decades spent out of the limelight.

New York City Ballet's (NYCB) brightest star since age 14 and muse of its celebrated choreographer, George Balanchine, Kirkland left NYCB in 1969 to join ABT in 1974. After making the cover of Time Magazine in 1978 she spent the next 12 years dancing the most famous roles in ballet's repertoire. Partnered by such ballet superstars as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Anthony Dowell and Ivan Nagy, Kirkland's career grew to include guest performances with the finest ballet companies from around the world.

Acquiring her legendary status in the 70's and 80's when ballet was booming and dance had sprung into fashion and popular culture, Kirkland redefined the connection between pure virtuoso, classical technique and an unparalleled artistic ability. Wowing audiences with her rich musicality, the ballerina's extraordinary physical gifts offset her depths as an actress, often leaving her audiences gasping at the exquisite beauty seen in every nuance of thought through movement on stage.

The decision to transition from the performing spotlight and into teaching and coaching professional dancers across the globe came in 1986, and has led her to work with The Royal Ballet School, English National Ballet, ABT and the Australian Ballet before returning to the US.

It is the collaboration with her real-life partner, dramaturge and former dancer, Michael Chernov, and ABT Artistic Director and choreographer, Kevin Mackenzie, which is bringing *The Sleeping Beauty* to life for audiences in 2007.

Kirkland will appear as the evil sorceress Carabosse in three of the performances including opening night on Tuesday July 17, while the Tony and Emmy award-winning production design team is ready again to thrill the public as much as the dancers will inspire the next generation of young artists to pursue the elite world of classical ballet.

As a bonus for families with young children, Angelina Ballerina, the national children spokesperson for National Dance Week, will make special appearances at the matinee performances on July 21-22. Involved with ABTKids since 2003, this little star with big dreams of being a prima ballerina will meet-and-greet her fans after the show.

The timeless tale of a princess, a curse, and the sweet kiss of her handsome prince can tug at the heart, at any age. But there is something more to this updated production danced by artists in their prime. As an audience it is easy to fall under the beautiful, wordless spell cast by the performers and for an evening, we are sure to believe in magic.

The ABT production of *The Sleeping Beauty* runs from July 17–22 in the Segerstrom Hall. There are five evening performances with matinees at 2pm on Saturday and Sunday.

Tickets are on sale from June 3, 2007 with prices ranging from \$25–\$95 and are available at The Center's Box Office located at 600 Town Center Drive in Costa Mesa. You can also book by phone at 714.556.2787 or online at www.ocpac.org.

For inquiries about group ticket discounts, call The Center's Group Sales office at 714.755.0236. The Center's TTY number is 714.556.2746.

The Orange County Performing Arts Center presents a broad range of programming each season that includes ballet, dance, top Broadway shows, jazz, cabaret, orchestral ensembles and many other special events. They also offer many programs for young people to follow their dreams and explore the arts.

For more information please go to www.ocpac.org.