

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

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### 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'

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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."

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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").