

Tchaikovsky

Excerpts from

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY

PIERRE MONTEUX

Conducting the

London Symphony Orchestra

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TCHAIKOVSKY

Excerpts from *THE SLEEPING BEAUTY*, Op. 66

PIERRE MONTEUX

conducting *The London Symphony Orchestra*

SIDE 1

Band 1 — Prologue: INTRODUCTION AND MARCH; PAS DE SIX

Band 2 — Act I: WALTZ; PAS D'ACTION; DANCE VERTIGO

SIDE 2

Band 1 — Act II: FARANDOLE; PANORAMA

Band 2 — Act III: POLACCA; PAS DE QUATRE; PAS DE QUATRE (Adagio, Cinderella and Prince Fortune, Blue Bird, Coda); PAS DE CARACTÈRE; ADAGIO; CODA; FINALE AND APOTHEOSIS

Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky was a composer who, in the sphere of aesthetic achievement, may be said to have lived and worked on several different levels. There are the highly personalized laments of his symphonies, the formalistic turns of the suites, the virtuoso brilliance of the concertos, the tenderness of the songs, and—in that choicest of Tchaikovskian worlds—the intimacy and imagination of his writing for the theater.

The operas, the ballets, this master's signal feeling for the stage were, until recently, little known in this country. Only the symphonies and concertos prevailed. Fortunately, during the past two decades, great European performances of *Eugen Onégin*, notably in Vienna, have succeeded in creating a wider international listening group for this opera. Another lyric drama, *Mazeppa*, was revived with great success at the Florence May Festival of 1955. *Pique Dame* is now moving healthily from the esteem of connoisseurs to the growing affection of a general public.

Perhaps the ultimate fame of this composer, however, will rest upon his ballets, and especially upon *The Sleeping Beauty*. The influence of Tchaikovsky's writing for the dance, its rhythmical freedom and variety of color, has been felt by most of his successors and notably, in our time, by the great ballet composers Stravinsky and Prokofiev. Stravinsky, with *The Fairy's Kiss*, dedicated to the memory of Tchaikovsky and using some of his actual themes, has rendered striking public homage.

The Sleeping Beauty, a spectacular full-length ballet based on the familiar tale of the enchanted princess and her awakener, was first performed at the Mariinsky Theater, St. Petersburg, in 1890. Because of its gigantic choreographic span and the practical expense of production, mountings of the work in its entirety, outside of Russia, were long a rarity until the Royal Ballet's (formerly Sadler's Wells) revival of recent years supplanted

the usual patchwork arrangements of dances and made the complete version standard.

The symphonic extracts in the present recording are gathered from some of the most colorful pages in the score. As the curtain rises on the gilded throne room of King Florestan XXIV, whose infant daughter, Princess Aurora, is about to be christened, a rousing introduction and march are heard. A group of six benevolent spirits appears, bearing gifts and wishes of good fortune for the Princess. A long-breathed, lovely clarinet melody marks their entrance; and each one dances a solo variation, culminating in the appearance of the winsome Lilac Fairy. The most famous of these solo dances is the one for the Singing Canary, usually known as the "Finger Variation" because of the animated fluttering of her hands.

The remaining action of this Prologue is well known to ballet-lovers. Carabosse, the wicked fairy, who has not been invited to the christening, dashes into the hall and curses the infant, predicting that Aurora, in the prime of her youth, will prick her finger and die. Raising her wand in protection, the Lilac Fairy promises that instead of dying on the appointed day, the Princess shall slumber until awakened by a kiss from a King's son.

Sixteen years pass, and the First Act begins. Aurora is marriageable now, and four of the most eligible princes of the world have come as her suitors. At a great celebration in her honor, a waltz (perhaps the best-known excerpt from the ballet) is danced by peasants and villagers. Then comes the superb moment of the Rose Adagio for Aurora and her four suitors, at the climax of which the Princess releases her flower-bearing cavaliers and remains in balance through her own technical address. Suddenly, an old woman steals across the garden. She reveals a spindle to the Princess, who has never seen one, since these objects have been banned from the Kingdom. The dread point penetrates Aurora's finger and the girl drops, as if lifeless. As the old woman laughs malignantly and draws back her cloak, the roaring theme of the wicked fairy mounts from the orchestra. She disappears . . . and, in her place, stands the Lilac Fairy, prepared to carry out her promise of protection. She waves her wand, and an enchanted woodland springs up to conceal Aurora until her awakener should arrive.

A hundred more years go by; and, in Act Two, a hunting party appears in a glade near the magic wood. Prince

Charming is among them, surrounded by courtiers and admiring noblewomen. The Prince, moody and bored, keeps to himself and lingers at dusk after the others have gone. Almost at once, the Lilac Fairy appears, tells him of the sleeping Princess who awaits his kiss, and offers to lead him to the palace where Aurora lies enchanted. To the music of woodwinds and harp, she guides the Prince to a bark and steers the boat gently through the waters, as a shifting panorama passes.

In the final act, the Prince awakens the sleeping girl. The dust of a century vanishes by magic, the King and Queen appear, and the great ceremony of Aurora's wedding to Prince Charming takes place. It is celebrated not only by the court but by strange guests from the world of fairy tales who have come to perform eye-filling *divertissements*. After their impressive entrance in a dashing polonaise, they are seen in various solo and group dances, including a number for four sprites (now usually performed, through the dictates of tradition, by three) representing precious stones and metals; a celebrated duo called "The Blue Bird" in which the opening adagio, exotically scored for high-lying woodwinds, yields to dazzling solo variations for both dancers and a whirlwind coda; an amusing bit for Red Riding Hood and the Wolf; a noble and sweepingly austere *pas de deux* for Aurora and her Prince, marking both the dramatic and formal climax of the ballet; and then a grave, surprising apotheosis. Here the exuberant music suddenly enters into a minor key. The mood and color become nineteenth-century Russian, rather than baroque fairyland; and one feels, in the air, that the court of Florestan XXIV has ended its masquerade and come into proper focus, during these final measures, as the mighty retinue of the Romanoffs in imperial St. Petersburg, where *The Sleeping Beauty* was first performed.

Notes by ROBERT LAWRENCE

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