



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

## Radiant Triumph at the Vienna State Ballet: Dornröschen

Vienna State Opera, 05.07.2025 [ENA]

On a luminous summer evening at the Wiener Staatsoper's grand auditorium, the Vienna State Ballet presented Martin Schläpfer's *Dornröschen* (Sleeping Beauty), conducted by Robert Reimer. This majestic staging, part of the 2024–25 season, unfolded as a sublime celebration of classical grace and poetic imagination. The production not only honored Tchaikovsky's score but infused the familiar fairy tale with fresh emotion

It was visual splendor, reaffirming why *Sleeping Beauty* is often called the “ballet of ballets. Schläpfer's Choreography masterfully merges the grandeur of royal ceremony with an undercurrent of mystical wonder. As the synopsis on the Staatsoper's site notes, the ballet “touches on parents and children, love and power, and the intrusion of mythical and natural beings into the life at a royal court”. The result is a performance of breathtaking visual contrasts: radiant court scenes give way to shimmering fairy apparitions, and the tonal shifts—from light-filled celebration to melancholic suspense—are enacted through dance that is both expressive and disciplined.

The baptismal gala for Princess Aurora sparkles with ceremonial grandeur. The six fairies and their children deliver their gifts; tensions arise as the Master of Ceremonies announces the omission of Carabosse, who responds with dramatic flair and melodramatic curse. The Lilac Fairy softens the spell, as the court processes the terrifying shift from blessing to peril. It sets a dramatic stage where every gesture speaks volumes and audience anticipation is instant and palpable. Sixteen-year-old Aurora's surprise birthday celebration bursts with youthful energy and elegance. Schläpfer fills the stage with refined geometry—dancers weave symmetrical formations around Aurora, played with youthful poise and sweet luminosity.

The atmosphere shifts mid-scene as Carabosse reappears, her presence physically distinct. Dancers embodying woods and wild spirits guide Aurora toward the spindle; the fatal prick is a choreographic moment of hushed inevitability, and Aurora's collapse is poetry in motion. The palace is enshrouded in vines and moonlit solitude. The gravity of Long Sleep fades as Prince Désiré enters, questing through a fairytale forest, guided by ethereal woodland figures. The path to Aurora's chamber is a lyrical testament to hope and perseverance. Schläpfer's staging here is delicate and dreamlike, balancing narrative clarity with ethereal subtlety.

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The moment when Désiré kisses Aurora ignites both relief and radiant joy. The reunion scene is lyrical, with dancers breathing life into the tableau. The following wedding divertissements—standard in Petipa-style productions—feel joyous yet fresh: fairies, woodland creatures, and guests mingle in a celebration of colors and movement, culminating in a lavish yet tender wedding waltz. Royal transitions end the ballet with grace. Robert Reimer draws out Tchaikovsky’s lush orchestral palette with subtlety and pacing. No note is wasted—every chord supports narrative nuance, from the ceremonial fanfares to the shimmering strings that underscore the Faeries. Tchaikovsky’s score is treated not as mere accompaniment but as a co-equal partner.

Florian Etti’s sets evoke both court and forest with conceptual elegance; ceremony and storybook atmosphere merge seamlessly. Catherine Voeffray’s costumes—rich robes for royalty, diaphanous wings for fairy beings—lend classical beauty and tactile depth. Thomas Diek’s lighting and video atmospheres add narrative tone: a crystalline ballroom glow, dreamy forest haze, moonlit chamber—the visual storytelling enhances without distracting. The principal dancer embodies the purity and poise demanded by Aurora’s iconic pas de deux. The iconic Rose Adagio—expected to test balance and strength—is a highlight: sustained attitudes, seamless transitions, and classical refinement show both technical mastery and emotive clarity.

These two figures define the ballet’s emotional extremes. Carabosse is no mere shadow figure—the dancer invests her curse with theatrical personality, dark magnetism, and a commanding stage presence. In contrast, the Lilac Fairy embodies luminous calm, guiding Aurora’s fate. Their confrontation pulses with archetypal tension, dance as elemental storytelling. The corps de ballet live up to classical expectations and beyond. Court dances sparkle with precision and flair, while the fairies and forest creatures glide with graceful restraint. Wood spirits flit across stage with delicate, choreographed lightness.

The Blue Bird pas de deux in the final act is a joyous mini-masterpiece: high-flying jumps and airy partnering bring narrative and technical contrast choreography’s testament to Schläpfer’s ensemble building. What makes this production unforgettable is its seamless integration of traditional and fresh elements. Schläpfer’s choreography remains rooted in Petipa, but allows subtle reinterpretation of character and narrative emphasis. The story gains emotional depth: Aurora’s innocence is touched with youthful curiosity and will; Désiré’s journey feels earned; Carabosse’s darkness is more than villainy—it is primal opposition. The production’s visuals—balanced ornamentation and conceptual clarity—support this emotional architecture.

Above all, Dornröschen reminds us why ballet can transform myth into human story. True to its lineage, it affirms beauty, ceremony, enchantment. Schläpfer, Reimer, and their collaborators have achieved a singular vision: a performance where the familiar becomes thrillingly present, where the timeless is made vivid

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again. Martin Schläpfer's Dornröschen at the Wiener Staatsoper is a landmark evening—a masterpiece of choreography, musicality, and design that celebrates classical ballet's traditions while granting them new expressive depth. Every element—from individual soloists to the full ensemble—remains oriented toward a poetic unity of body, sound, and story.

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