

The Sleeping Beauty

The Australian Ballet
Civic Theatre

Auckland

27 October 2006

REVIEWS



Madeleine Eastoe in *The Sleeping Beauty*

The *Sleeping Beauty* is an iconic fairy tale; an essential ingredient in any girl's fantasy land. The original story seeps back into Italian and other European folklore when farming families gathered round a communal fireplace, telling tales of ancient principalities whose royal intrigues saw them through the winter. The tension between good and evil is finely balanced - it is no pushover either way, each force has a will to win; escapism at its best. The original choreography was one of Petipa's masterpieces — a baroque wonderland of lavish tutus and sets and crystal clear mime that directs the action,

The Australian Ballet Company's new production by Stanton Welch reworks the classic tale; the set and costume design by the late Kristian Fredrikson kept some of the lavishness, but the fairies were lycra lean.

In the pivotal opening Act I the action was urgent, but a little obscure. Huge parcels, delivered with great aplomb by children, eclipsed the bestowing fairy's dance presence. The new born princess, Aurora, was disconcertingly invisible, engulfed by an outsized crib and the royal couple too were dwarfed by the magic of the occasion. This unbalancing of the traditional scale, while interesting, impeded a clear reading of the storyline.

The scene was further blurred by both the good and bad fairies' entourages clad in flowing white — although the grotesque trolls and gothic frost-breathing creatures were appropriately sinister.

The Lilac Fairy, whose role is to restore calm and order, denuded of her tutu and scantily clad in barely violet stretched lycra, was diminished in her pivotal role; Caraboose, the wicked fairy on 'the other hand' was very visible.

Other parts were more successful; indolent court cats charmed, Prince Florimund, (Robert Curran) in Act II hunting in the icy forest was eerie and his eventual courtship and nuptial dance with Aurora, (Madeleine Eastoe) was

magical; the bluebird solo (Remi Rortmeyer) was sheer delight. Overall the strength of the production was the depth and strength of the dancing by all members of the company, and consistent high levels of artistry by all lead dancers.

Francesca Horsley

INK

Choreographed by Maria Dabrowska
Dance Your Socks Off Festival
Bats Theatre
Wellington
Sept 21-23

An inaugural graduate of the Unitec Bachelor of Performing and Screen Arts Degree in 1998, Wellington-based Maria Dabrowska has quietly made the windy capital her creative niche since then, steadily compiling a wacky collection of avant-garde dance productions which (although seemingly overlooked by the funding powers that be) never fail to rate highly on a scale of 'urban underground coolness' by all those in the know.

INK, her newest work, was made in collaboration with lighting designer Martyn Roberts, with sound design by Stephen Gallagher. The pre-show mood was created within Bat's crowded box-office corridor, where peering into a mirrored floor tile installation (reminiscent of *Alice through the Looking Glass*) you could see perspectives of various Dabrowska dance doubles projected onto the staircase above... or was it below? Clever visual trickery, it was



an introduction to the experimental European design aesthetic that was to come.

INK began as a black pit filled to the brim with haze, solid light beams slowly inching their way through the submerged atmosphere and staining the darkness with its spatial ambiguity. Expectations of seeing dancing limbs jump out like a bad *Jaws* movie never materialised, as Dabrowska's prone black clothed body was very minutely and ever so slowly revealed. Her first solo displayed typical quick-as-a-flash hand gestures and contorted spinal poses that make up her trademark movement vocabulary, but developed further with leg splits that knocked the side of her head in a dazzling and virtuosic way,

The next scene of Dabrowska on a table (that seemed to be in an alcove) in bondage style garb with black gaffa-taped breasts, clog ears and the distant sounds of neighbourhood dogs barking caught the viewer unawares and located us, or her, trapped in some seedy suburban dungeon.

She was surprisingly joined by a sexy minx in a red outfit (the fabulous Mel Hamilton in a guest appearance) in a sequence that featured two lounge chairs and a nostalgic tune that seemed reminiscent of an old boudoir somewhere. Using minimal sitting poses performed in exact synchronicity also highlighted another facet of Dabrowska's crafting, showing a keen sense of timing and absorbing performance focus that went beyond predictable musicafity,

The final dance was scattered amongst the shifting passages of light to a track of operatic music that was serene and uplifting. Manipulating their solo movement separately yet coming together at certain points, opened up a world of interplay between light, shade and movement that lay at the crux of the concept. The light was fantastically designed and a close friend to the dance on this occasion,

Dabrowska is an unconventional and totally idiosyncratic dance artist whose dark sensuality tinged with razor-sharp comic wit slips in the places of our psyche and imagination we are usually not allowed to go. Like eating the last chocolate in your parent's special truffle box, watching her dance is always a naughty but wicked pleasure. Consume at your own peril!

Jack Gray

Memoirs of Active Service

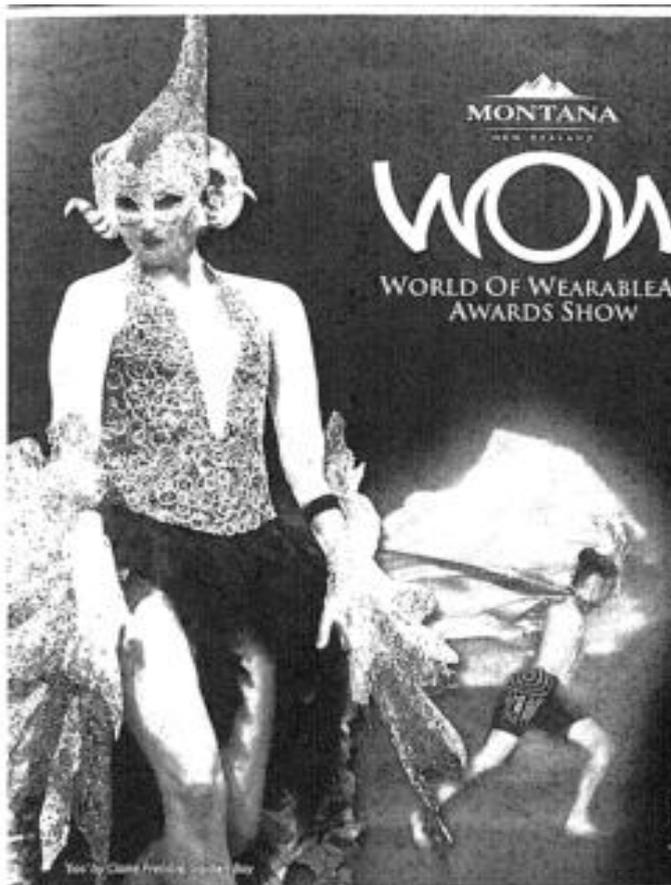
Maaka Pepene

Atamira Dance Collective
Maidment Studio, Auckland
November 2006

Ka maumahara tonu tatou ki a ratou - we will remember them...poignant last words...bidding farewell to a generation of veterans moving on... leaving fragments of memories and diaries for children/grandchildren to honour; celebrate and remember ...black costumes billow, fold, swirl and wrap the dancers bodies...wide sweeping arm movements...jumps and turns...slides on all fours - provide the vehicle for five accomplished dancers to fill the space with fluidity and lyricism in this very moving finale, a lament set to Albinoni's adagio - maybe old soldiers never die.

Thoughts and memories of my dad Ken (25th Battalion Italy and Egypt) were rekindled. In my experience men who served in WW I I rarely talked about their experiences except over a few beers with other veterans. I suspect Charles John Murphy (Jack, 28th Maori Battalion) was exactly the same, leaving his grandson Maaka Pepene to be the Kaitiaki of his diary recorded during his service in WWII and to tell his story. The result is a dance theatre work, *Memoirs of Active Service*, choreographed by Maaka for Atamira Dance Collective and first performed in 2006, marking the year of the Veteran.

Texts from Jack's diary are beautifully filmed and narrated, Uncomplicated, yet insightful, this dialogue to his wife forms the backbone of this piece. The first dance duet captures intimate moments between sweethearts Jack Murphy and his wife, before he leaves for war.



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The dancers embrace, two bodies mingle, palms touch as bodies arch away and return to each other with outstretched arms becoming one. The moon is their witness.

Jack and his two other brothers, through repetitive drills and combat exercises with a sense of humour and camaraderie, along with the Maori Battalion Marching Song, give us insight into life as a soldier in this special regiment. "And now begins a strange adventure" Jack wrote in his diary in April 1943.

The episodic work also embraces "those loved ones that remain in Aotearoa in the 1940s". In headscarves, the women Justine Hohaia (Jack's wife) and Kelly Nash abandon their intense listening to the radio for news to dance a hilarious number to Gracie Fields complete with *thingamebobs for watchamocallits* to support the war effort. Repetitive, gestural movement hints at an assembly line process, however the women in this narrative have other ideas and join the navy.

Climate extremes from dessert heat to cold snowy conditions further compounded the plight of these WWII veterans. Dancer soldiers Jack Gray, Sean McDonald and Peter Takapuna shuffle, lean back, lie, toss and turn, restless in their uneasy sweltering slumber indicative of the Egyptian desert. The atmosphere reeked of intense heat, sweat and biting flies that threaten to smother them,

In sharp contrast they huddle in the extreme cold rubbing hands vigorously as the anguish of war is etched on their faces. Each one breaks away from the group to dance a solo where memories of better days and horrors of war meld into a

distorted realism. Before Jack went to the front line he wrote in his diary "Don't worry dearest, I'll come back to you. Yours till the stars lose their glory, your own darling Paddy". Jack did return to New Zealand after the war and although this is his story, the experience is common to other WWII soldiers.

The work has a strong and effective sound score by Paddy Free including 1940's songs. In keeping with Atamira's philosophy, this work draws on a personal story, history and whakapapa and is imbued with Maaka's six formative years in the Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment. With this work, Maaka embraces the words of the National RSA President (2006), "Kiwis must never forget those who served in wartime and peacetime – this is not an option – it is a way of life".

Sue Cheesman
The Jewel In The Ocean Of Life: Pride, Power and Pathos

Kanan Deobhakta Dance Co.
Tempo° 06
Auckland
13 October 2006

A jewel; a refractive light-splitting lens used in watches to keep time; a personal ornament; a precious person or thing. All of these definitions apply to Kanan Deobhakta's most recent programme of Indian classical dance.

Let me explain...The programme of four acts; Pride, Power of happiness, Power of destruction

and Pathos, explores trust and betrayal, and how one may quickly bend its way around to become the other. Such flickering lights of fickle emotions are highly suited to the genre of Bharata Natyam. The mix of abstract and interpretative solos (a rigorous form in any genre) facilitated the audience's encounters with a range of humanity, from gurus to despots. Today's world, as we hear about in the media, daily.

This was a refreshing programme, in a 'traditional' dance genre. Kanan works within the nooks and crannies of her heritage and continually reinvents anew. She maintains a timeless pulse, but also ticks in time with contemporary concerns.

The luxuriant glamour of the production captivates, glitters, and is reflective of the precious philosophy we see on the movement surfaces. Pictures of our precious world – the simple, small things, that are easily overlooked, resonate in the refinement and delicacy of the mudras.

Then there are the soloists and the range of performance qualities. Pratima's rhythmical poise and deceptive athleticism, explicit in the free flowing leg gestures. Kanan's stage presence and ownership of the theatre space, float on the air out to the audience with the incense, redolent with elegance.

May such jewels in New Zealand's dance community long maintain their translucence an our support.

Linda Ashley