

# PITTSBURGH BALLET THEATRE

Department of Education  
and Community Engagement

## *The Sleeping Beauty* Listening Guide

Use this guide to familiarize yourself with the music of the ballet. See the Glossary of Musical Terms for definitions of underlined words.

[Introduction, Prologue](#) (Carabosse motif) Tchaikovsky created themes or motifs for the story's main characters that recur throughout the ballet, both in simple melodies and more complex orchestrations. In the opening of the prologue of *The Sleeping Beauty*, the orchestra sets the tone for the ominous occurrences in the ballet by immediately introducing the motif for Carabosse. The curtain has not yet risen at this point as the allegro vivo music draws us with an adrenaline rush right into the fairytale's world. Carabosse's motifs draw upon a long tradition of utilizing lower-sounding instruments to denote the villain, exemplified here by shrieking, bursting trombones and tubas in a forte fortissimo (see excerpt below) and the consistent murmur of the bows across the lower strings of the cellos and basses. The rhythm of her theme builds in intensity over the course of the phrase, starting with two short eighth notes, a longer held note, then several eighth notes in swift succession. This is followed by a chromatic run starting in the timpani working up through the winds and ending on a cymbal crash at the end of the phrase.

[Act 1, Rose Adagio](#) The stately held notes of the lower brass provide a solid foundation for the soaring, legato melody of the violins in this adagio, some of the most recognizable music from the ballet. The 12/8 meter gives the piece a lilting musicality—because every beat has 3 eighth notes—while at the same time fitting squarely into the more typical four counts used in many dances. Towards the end of the excerpt, the violins have short chromatic runs that provide a whimsical texture contrasting the earlier fluidity of the main melody. During this section, Aurora performs one of the most famous technical feats of all ballets—her balancing *en pointe* in an attitude (one leg lifted and bent backwards at a 90 degree angle to the standing leg). She performs one of these balances with each of her four suitors.

[Act 3—Bluebird female](#) (start YouTube at :58) As the opening excerpts of this piece showcase (see above), the underlying pizzicato strings are paralleled by *pique* (“pricking”) steps, while the flute melody, with its bouncing rhythm and extensive use of grace notes, are mirrored by Princess Florine's quick *bourrées*, or fluttering of her feet, on pointe. Halfway through the clarinet picks up a countermelody in clarinet. Then, as Princess Florine showcases a variety of breathtaking turns, a steady eighth note rhythm builds in intensity to rising pizzicato flourish at the end of the piece.

[Act 3—Grand Pas de Deux](#) (start YouTube at 2:22) While the entire Grand Pas de Deux of *The Sleeping Beauty* is renowned for the vast range of passion and emotion that it encompasses, this section of the Grand Pas de Deux in Act 3 is every bit as dramatic as the blaring, heavily accented, exuberant horns and low brass proclaim. As Aurora and the Prince showcase stunning precision in footwork and breathtaking lifts (including the “fish lift” that is noted by “fishes” in the excerpt), the music finally resolves into a more pleasant legato phrase in the violins that immediately begins to build back up. As the music intensifies, Aurora spins several times as the music descends before she lands in a supported arabesque on the downbeat, symbolizing the harmony between her and her Prince.

# PITTSBURGH BALLET THEATRE

Department of Education  
and Community Engagement

Accent—a < symbol underneath a note to indicate playing it very heavily and forcefully

Glossary of Musical Terms

*Allegro*—quick, lively tempo

Brass instruments—metal wind instruments, including: trumpet, trombone, euphonium, and tuba

Chromatic—use of full tones and semi tones (flat or sharp) within a scale

Countermelody—a subordinate melody accompanying the principal line

*Crescendo*—to grow louder

Double reeds—instruments whose sound is produced by two joined reeds vibrating, including oboes, English horns, and bassoons

Dynamic—volume

*f (forte)*—loud

*ff (fortissimo)*—very loud

*Fff (forte fortissimo)*—as loud as possible

Grace notes—a musical ornament of a quickly played note before the main note in a phrase; written as a smaller note with a line through the tail that is tied to the main note

*Legato*—in a smooth, even style

Measure—one completion of the number of beats indicated in the time signature. The end of a measure is designated by a vertical line in the score.

Melody—a musical line or statement comprising a series of notes

Meter—a synonym for time signature

*p (piano)*—soft

*pp (pianissimo)*—very soft

*Pizzicato*—played with plucked strings

Sixteenth notes—quick notes; four sixteenths per beat

Rhythm—a pattern of pulses, or beats, in music

# PITTSBURGH BALLET THEATRE

Department of Education  
and Community Engagement

*Staccato*—short articulation

Strings—wooden instruments with strings, played by bowing or plucking, including: violins, violas, celli, and double bass

Tempo—pace of the music

Theme—a brief melody which forms the basis of a passage

Time signature—an indication of rhythm and beat. 2/4 is felt in two beats that are each divided into even numbers of smaller beats; 6/8 is felt in two beats that are each divided into three smaller beats

Tremolo—a wavering effect produced by quickly alternating between two notes

*Vivace*—lively and vivacious

Winds—instruments whose tones are produced by air being blown through them

Woodwinds—wind instruments, most of them made of wood, including: clarinet, oboe, flute, bassoon, French horn, bass clarinet, and English horn