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## Entertainment

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# 'Sleeping Beauty' wakes up to jazz

GIL KAUFMAN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

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Tchaikovsky's "Sleeping Beauty" has long been considered one of his finest scores, which might explain why, nearly 120 years after it premiered in St. Petersburg, Russia, it remains one of the most popular ballets of all time.

But the classic tale of good (the Lilac Fairy) versus evil (Carabosse) that incorporates grand waltzes, a game of blind man's bluff and a pas de deux was due for a radical makeover, which is exactly what ballet tech cincinnati had in mind when it commissioned "Jazzy Sleeping Beauty."

The fresh take on the ballet gets its world premiere this weekend at the Aronoff Center as the kickoff of ballet tech's seventh Season Series. It will feature live accompaniment by the three-time Cappie Award-winning Cincinnati Hills Christian Academy Electric Jazz and Student Orchestra.

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Also fresh is that it features an African-American Sleeping Beauty - ballet tech cincinnati's Epiphany Davis, 17 - and Black Princes - professional dancers from the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company and Ballethnic Dance Company.

"We wanted to make it relevant for a young, diverse audience to help them appreciate ballet and dance in general, and specifically the social aspect of it," says choreographer Waverly T. Lucas II, the co-founder and Artistic Director of Atlanta's Ballethnic Dance Company, about his charge from ballet tech to put a new spin on the story.

"Sometimes, as dancing professionals, we lose the idea that the biggest attraction to

dance is that it's a social entity. Dance is becoming one of those things that you point to and say, 'That's what they do.' But it's something we all do, at different levels."

Waverly, who says he was not at all intimidated by the historic importance of the piece, got the gig thanks to previous popular re-imaginings such as his "Urban Nutcracker." He worked on the "Beauty" makeover with composer Mark Lucas, who was asked to score the ballet with upbeat, jazzy arrangements of the Tchaikovsky music.

In addition to performing in the classic "Beauty" twice himself, Waverly has watched as many different productions as he could on YouTube and decided that the best way to make the dance more contemporary was, ironically, to avoid making it contemporary.

"A lot of ballet tries to go overboard and make it right now," he says. "But in my opinion, what's going on now is not that interesting. What's exciting about someone standing in front of a computer?"

Instead, after leaving the first act mostly intact, if a bit more concise and with the addition of some renamed characters, Waverly flashes the second act forward to a jazz club in the 1940s, where master of ceremonies Catallabutte is a club owner whose job it is to get the party going with a pas de deux that swings to a jazz score.

By adding furry arachnids that morph into a giant, glow-in-the-dark spider-like human character, traditional Indian dance and a "boot" dance in which children stomp around in adult shoes, Waverly is confident that his "Beauty" will shine through to a whole new generation.

E-mail [gilkco@aol.com](mailto:gilkco@aol.com)



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Epiphany Davis, 17 and a Cincinnati Hills Christian Academy graduate, stars with Gary Harris in "Jazzy Sleeping Beauty."

When You Go

**What:** Jazzy Sleeping Beauty

**Where:** Jarson-Kaplan Theater, Aronoff Center for the Arts, 650 Walnut St., downtown

**When:** 8 p.m. today, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday

**Admission:** \$26; 513-621-2787

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