

Karen Kain
Artistic Director

Metro
October 9-12, 2009

An ideal fairy tale

National Ballet kicks off the fall season with Sleeping Beauty

JOHN KEILLOR
For Metro Canada

Artistic director Karen Kain brings Cold War spy glamour to The National Ballet of Canada's season opener, performing Rudolf Nureyev's version of The Sleeping Beauty.

Nureyev was a supremely gifted and wild Soviet dancer who defected at a Parisian airport in 1961, resulting in a life of international celebrity and KGB harassment. In 1972, Nureyev brought his unique choreography to Toronto, and danced opposite Kain as Princess Aurora, when Kain was Canada's top ballerina.

Now Kain brings first hand knowledge of Nureyev's genius again to

Toronto. Performing the role of the princess will be the company's gorgeous principle dancer, Xiao Nan Yu, stepping into a highlight moment in Canadian dance history.

"This will be my first time as Princess Aurora," says Yu, by phone. "It's my favorite role because it's an ideal fairy tale, waking up to a handsome prince. Tchaikovsky's music is amazing, and the set's costumes are wonderful."

Yu sounds entirely enthusiastic and not too worried about the challenge of dancing Nureyev's steps, which were considered almost impossible when the production was first mounted in 1966.

"Karen (Kain) coaches me,

Schedule

- The National Ballet of Canada's fall season will start with *The Sleeping Beauty* from Nov. 13 through 22. The season will also feature *World Premiere* by Azure Barton & *The Four Temperaments & Glass Pieces* from Nov. 25 through 29. For more information visit national.ballet.ca

as well as the whole production of *Beauty*," explains Yu. "She has an amazing memory and can recall her dancing with Nureyev as if it were yesterday. Each day we do two hours of personal training in steps, turns and jumps. The more we do it, the more the perform-

ance is elegant and effortless."

"Effortless" in this case is a relative, term, insofar as Nureyev (1938-1954) was a Glenn Gould-ish super-performer, whose revolutionary technique and conception of his art shook up the world of dance while bringing to it a larger audience.

"Definitely Nureyev inspired the entire dance world," concurs Yu. "The technique is very challenging, as is the staging, with 25 dancers performing at the same time. It goes beyond classical ballet in a way that will appeal to most people, even if they have no background in dance."

This is not to say that classical ballet is easier, necessarily. "Both Nureyev's cho-



The National Ballet of Canada's principle dancer Xiao Nan Yu plays Princess Aurora in the company's production of *The Sleeping Beauty*.

reography and classical ballet are actually equally hard," explains Yu, "it's never easy. But Nureyev's rendition pushes every dancer completely to the limit. That's the way he was with himself."