

Noda review.

Beauty and the Beast

As we entered the auditorium the audience walked through the castle entrance into a magical world incredibly transformed by the set designers and team of builder and painters. Changing a school hall into an enchanting world is no mean feat but this was exceptional. A staircase on stage left, rose to a rampart terrace where a large glass globe containing the famous fading red rose, lit so it glistened, was positioned. A sliding wall allowing large stage props to be hidden and then appear on stage during scene changes. The gorgeous orchestra surreptitiously hidden behind the staircase glimpsed through a lancet style window. Hidden entrances on both left and right of the stage, centrally through a red velvet cloth and from the ramparts above. A beautifully painted floor showing circular stonework representing a castle floor completed this image. All of this was lit with blue and white gobos over the floor and across the ramparts of the castle facade. The lighting throughout was designed to great effect with flashing lights as the beast enters, orange muted lighting and lit lamps carried by the villagers as they search for the beast and the green flashing lights as Belle fights off the wolves in the woods. The lit cup that the actor playing chip sits in on Mrs Potts tea trolley and the yellow spot on Belle and the transformed Prince, during the finale, with muted reds and blues surrounding them. The lighted candlestick blown out by Cogsworth was genius!

The sound team were excellent using echo on the personal mics of actors as they enter the castle along with the beast's growl and the chopping and clanging effect of Maurice's wood cutting invention. Personal mics were controlled expertly especially when dealing with underscore and dialogue. Stage props and costumes were merged in this production with the castle characters as furniture, candlesticks, clocks or china, which I will mention further with each character.

Cogsworth, dressed in an elegantly designed solid clock with face and key in her back, wig and moustache and white gloves was acted perfectly by this actor. She gave us the worrying, grumpiness of the character in spades, and his meticulousness in protecting his master, eventually mellowing until transformed. With hilarious one-liners such as 'if it's not Baroque don't fix it', this actor had Cogsworth exactly right. His friend and rival, Lumiere, is a candelabra, dressed in gold from top to toe and with candle hands (with the wicks lit by the actor). With a superb French accent and exceptional comic timing this actor tap-danced and sang her way through the production, flirting mercilessly with Babette and 'winding up' his friend and rival, Cogsworth. These two were just brilliant to watch. Along with the delightful Mrs Potts whose rendition of the title song 'Beauty and the Beast' was singularly the best I have heard. Dressed in a costume of her own making consisting of a teapot shaped pink and white dress with spout for one arm and handle for the other, she was tremendously cheery, with a grey plaited wig and mop cap, as she moved her son, chip around on her tea trolley. The scenes with Cogsworth and Lumiere flowed with ease and the harmonies in 'Something There' and 'Human Again' were lovely. Chip was played by two younger actors. On the night I attended, Chip was played sweetly and even though she was trapped in a cup, every word of dialogue was clear and with funny lines like 'Do I have to still sleep in the cupboard?' delivered amusingly.

The villain of the piece is not the beast but Gaston who was perfectly vile in the best way. With a strong tenor voice and the right amount of vanity he performed 'Gaston' with expertise as he commanded attention. His side-kick, Le Fou, who is also an antagonist is played well as a dim-wit, who wishes to please Gaston constantly. These two really gelled together.

I loved both the costume and characterisation of Madam de la Grande Bouche. This character is a sentient wardrobe costume on wheels with drawers that open which this actor elegantly moved around the stage and that cannot have been easy. With a lovely operatic soprano voice and good French accent she performed 'Home' with Mrs Potts and Belle charmingly. Along with Babette, who is the naughty little French duster, who is Lumiere's 'petit amie'. She delightfully flirts with him throughout as she giggles, 'I've been burnt by you before' with a French accent and dressed in a costume covered in feathers. The supporting role of Maurice was graciously played by this actor with a lovely stage presence and fatherly protectiveness toward his daughter, Belle. The Silly girls dressed similarly but in different colours and with glossy blonde wigs, whined and cried with ease over Gaston and sang well together.

The leading role of Belle was portrayed well by this actor. Dressed in the iconic blue dress with white underskirt, red wig and blue ribbon and with a lovely singing voice she performed her musical numbers with ease and with believable acting showing her growing affection toward the beast. Played by an actor who has an exceptional tenor voice of depth and quality, the Beast was portrayed with a great sense of menace and later, such gentleness, conflicting with his nature and what he had become. This was cleverly acted with such feeling and very believable and when, at the end of act one he performed 'If I Can't Love Her' the audience responded with rapturous applause.

The ensemble of bakers, tavern masters, flower sellers, bookseller, milkmaids, peasants and towns people of this French provincial town made a great sound throughout the ensemble numbers and worked the choreography well. The choreographer, Georgia Steer, made good use of the stage especially during the first number. I liked how the ensemble stopped during Belle's interaction with the baker. T

The tap dancing in 'Be Our Guest' was an added treat. A great fight scene involving the masked wolves who danced around Belle threateningly and the movement during 'Be Our Guest' and the 'Mob Song' all moved well.

This brings me to the fantastic job of the wardrobe team who dressed every character as they should be. Gaston in red jacket, white loose shirt, black long wig and own beard, the peasants in various white blousons and skirts or in the tavern in gathered bodices. The masks for the wolves and the Beast's mask. Belle's beautiful yellow dress was exquisite. Lumiere in gold lit by the actor and chip's suit. The finale transformation costumes, where all of the characters are now real people, cleverly mimicked their 'magical' costume. Stage props such as Maurice working wood cutting invention built by the team, the beautiful bed Belle weeps on, the barred door held by actor and lit gently as Belle talks to Maurice and the knives, forks and spoons of the ensemble. These, the costumes, lights, set and sound were brought together by the director, Mike Canning, the musical Director, Allan Fouracre (and sadly, his last with this company) and their choreographer Georgia Steer, creating a superb production from CODS and a triumph for everyone involved. I can only congratulate you all for a wonderful evening of theatre and a well-deserved standing ovation. Thank you for inviting myself and my husband to 'Be Your Guests'.

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