"Disney's Beauty and the Beast"

By Linda Woolverton, Alan Menken, Howard Ashman and Tim Rice
At the Hippodrome Theatre through February 3

By James Cooper

A FAIRYTALE IN THE TREES

Many parents dislike the idea of venturing to a theater with their children to endure two hours of a childish film or stage production. Because adult humor is drastically different than that of a child, it’s hard to create a performance that is both amusing to the adult yet appropriate for the child.

Though “Beauty and the Beast” is a very juvenile show and its target audience is young children, many aspects of the show heighten the interest of the adults in the audience. From discreet sexual references to exploding cannons of confetti, “Beauty and the Beast” is a show that anyone would enjoy—no matter his or her age. The show successfully balances the entertainment aimed for children with references and technical details to excite the adults, leveling each other. The use of technical details—flashing lights and exploding confetti—with exaggerated and comic acting makes for a show that would entertain all ages.

From the moment one enters the theater one notices that the stage is surrounded by intricately carved wood that resembles a patch of foliage pulled aside to allow the audience to see the story. This reinforces the imaginary feeling found throughout the show. It’s almost as if the audience were secretly watching a different world unfolding right before their eyes. The sets and backdrops are either extremely large or extremely small, making the actors seem either very tall or very short by comparison, further reinforcing the idea that the story is make-believe. Vibrant oranges, pinks, yellows and reds add a warm and story-like feeling to the overall feel of the show. All of these contributing factors make for a surreal and fairytale-like world.

Though the set successfully creates a storybook feel within the audience, at times the effect feels so overdone that it becomes distracting. Not only does the set have its moments of implausibility, but so does the acting. Because the show is meant for children the acting must be exaggerated and engaging. However, to an adult the use of heightened acting pulls away from the show’s believability. Nonetheless the show still manages to draw the audience in further with exciting dance numbers and comic moments.

“Beauty and the Beast” is a show about society and how some members may be frowned upon for deviating from the mainstream. The main character, Belle (Hilary Maiberger), falls in love with a Beast (Darick Pead). The members of Belle’s “poor provincial town” try to execute the Beast, for their love is unnatural. The central conflict arises between the two characters and their path to lifelong companionship. Along the way, singing candlesticks, talking clocks and dancing plates assist Belle and the Beast to realize their love for each other.
After the Beast has several times asked Belle to dinner, he becomes frustrated with her constant refusal. Consequently Madame de la Grande Bouche (Shani Hadjian), Mrs. Potts (Erin Edelle), Lumiere (Hassan Nazari-Robati) and Cogsworth (James May) try to calm the Beast with deep breathing. All of the characters line up next to the Beast and start to breathe extremely deeply—to get him to follow their lead and calm down. Their exaggerated and comic breathing is just one example to support the idea that the show’s target audience is young children.

Though it has its off-scale sets and exaggerated moments, the show still manages to evoke emotion within the entire audience—adults and all. During the number “Be Our Guest,” the members of the household are trying to persuade Belle that the Beast isn’t a malevolent and selfish character. Lumiere holds a type of dinner party with dancing plates, knives, forks and spoons. The dancing flatware sings the chorus to Lumiere’s multitude of solo verses, creating a fuller sound. At one point the singing knives, forks and spoons parade around the circus-like dining room with long horns. They then point the horns towards the audience resulting in an explosion of confetti, leaving the audience in awe.

Also, when Pead is delivering his solo number “If I Can’t Love Her,” the audience can’t help but feel empathy because of the obvious emotional connection between actor and character. However, his mental passion isn’t the only thing that draws the audience into the performance. During “If I Can’t Love Her,” Pead’s consistently clear consonants really convey how the Beast feels. This mix of emotional and technical components is what makes Pead such an interesting actor to watch.

Although the show’s target audience is young children, there are many lines that are obviously aimed for adults. For instance, while the Beast contemplates what to give Belle, Lumiere suggests “flowers, chocolates, promises you don’t intend to keep.” This reference is exactly the type of material that provokes interest within the adults in the audience because it specifically references adult relationships and experiences that one finds with time.

It’s these little jokes that prevent parents of young children from falling asleep and counting the minutes until the final curtain. Furthermore, Babette makes a subtle sexual reference when she says, “it’s been so long since I’ve seen a real man, no offense, Lumiere” causing what seems to be Lumiere’s sexual flame—his candlestick hands—to burn out.

Overall “Beauty and the Beast” is an excellent musical for children because of its simplicity and exaggerated acting. Although some may find the acting a bit unreal and some moments to be rushed, they forget to acknowledge that the rushed and overdone acting is intentional in order to make the show clearer for young children.

While it may be aimed for children, the show does have moments that keep the whole audience occupied—even the adults. The use of explosions and flashing lights keeps everyone alive while the subtle sexual and adult references provide sprinkled chuckles between the parents in the audience. “Beauty and the Beast” is an excellent family show that provides entertainment for all ages.
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By Linda Woolverton, Alan Menken, Howard Ashman and Tim Rice
At the Hippodrome Theatre through February 3

By Dori Coplan

A BEAUTY OF A SHOW

A fairy tale may enthrall and entertain young children, but when those kids grow up, they tend to lose interest in such fantastical stories. Yet when one sees “Beauty and the Beast,” now showing at the Hippodrome one instantly enjoys oneself, regardless of age. “Beauty and the Beast” closely resembles the classic Disney cartoon regarding casting, costumes and scenery; but the script adds some new adult lines and staging which amuse every audience member.

This ability to entrance adults as well as children is due to the production’s multiple dimensions. Although the choreography for a particular number or the observation of a certain character may seem childish, the transitions between those juvenile behaviors and the mature, more mysterious scenes in the mansion create a performance entertaining for all. This idea is shown during “The Mob Song” where initially the audience quietly taps their feet to the beat of the mugs clanking. But then as the townspeople and Gaston storm over to the mansion the music changes tempo, the lights dim and the entire audience waits in silent anticipation.

In addition, many of the characters show personalities which can be interpreted on many levels. In a child’s mind, a character may simply be silly while for an adult that same character would be considered witty and oddly humorous. Such as Gaston when he admires himself, children laugh at his funny gestures while the adults chuckle at his cockiness and his flock of followers.

The slight changes from the film script enable the stage to appeal to a broader range of ages. For example, Lumiere (Hassan Nazari-Robati) and Babette (Jessica Lorion) flirt with each other throughout the production which entertains the adults.

“Beauty and the Beast” is the story of a young woman, Belle (Hilary Maiberger) who becomes a captive of a reclusive prince who was turned into a beast by an enchantress. The play details their changing relationship as they become closer while simultaneously following Belle’s admirer, Gaston (Joe Hager) as he attempts to win her affection.

In the opening number “Belle,” the stage is brought to life as the lights illuminate the vibrant colors of the set: rich blues and greens of the village that complement the browns, yellows and reds of the townspeople’s costumes as they happily dance and sing. But when Belle halts singing and Gaston haughtily saunters on stage, the audience suddenly becomes more captivated with the number.

Hager, in his tight, fitted crimson top, black velvet breeches and matching cape, visually encapsulates the animated, childhood Gaston. As he pauses center stage, he begins to comically pose by patting his hair, flexing and kissing his biceps, and grunting “Hutzah!” Gaston keeps the
audience laughing throughout the show not only through his egocentric actions but also his idiocy. At one point, he conceitedly pronounces rendezvous as “Ren-des-vuses.” Although children may not know that Gaston pronounced rendezvous incorrectly, his overdramatic body language still entertains them.

Although mainly a comical show, “Beauty and the Beast” successfully transitions into a more haunting production during the scenes in Beast’s (Darick Pead) mansion. The lighting dramatically dims, casting the stage in dark blues and greens. On the twisted, spindly scenery, candles glow which not only sets the mood but also the period of the play. Additionally, for some of the scenes in the mansion, a scrim is artfully used to cast the stage in a deeper shadow, therefore enhancing the already eerie atmosphere. This atmosphere creates a mystical, mysterious feel within the audience causing even the adults to feel anxious as to what will occur next.

However, as soon as “Be Our Guest” begins, a hot pink curtain rolls down, and the show once again effectively shifts to a lighthearted comedy. Golden utensils dance onto the stage, holding trumpets that when blown shoots streamers out into the audience; ensemble women energetically perform showgirl kicks, and champagne bottles spurt steam from their nozzles. Flashing yellow show lights also add to the carefree, Vegas-y feel of the song. If Belle does not want to be their guest, the audience sure does after this number.

Each stage character so closely resembles their cartoon counterparts that their vocals as well as their body language are virtually indistinguishable. This is especially visible with Belle. As Maiberger performs “Belle” and “A Change In Me,” one cannot tell the difference between the voices of Maiberger and Paige O’Hara. This resemblance serves to amuse the young children as they see the show.

The similarity between the movie characters and musical actors is also strikingly apparent with Gaston, Lumiere, Cogsworth (James May) and Babette. However, while the vocals of the Beast are exemplary, his acting at times does not possess the dominant, aggressive manner associated with the cinematic Beast. When the script calls for hostile, roaring statements, Pead often falls short and lacks the necessary stage presence. Fortunately though this does not detract from the overall performance due to the Beast’s musical number “If I Can’t Love Her” which leaves the audience momentarily speechless.

“Beauty and the Beast” is a musical enjoyable for all ages. It successfully blends childish cartoons with a mature show to successfully entertain every member of the audience. The lighting and scenery brings the classic cartoon to life while still amusing adults with subtle details. From Gaston’s comical remarks to Belle’s graceful vocals, “Beauty and the Beast” is a show to see. Home is where the heart is, and “Beauty and the Beast” will take you there.

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At the Hippodrome Theatre through February 3
By Abigail Dohmeier

NEW SPIN ON TALE AS OLD AS TIME

The final rousing chorus of “Be Our Guest” pulses through the Hippodrome Theatre and it is evident from the audience’s gleeful smiles that all have been transported into the magical realm of “Beauty and the Beast.” And how could they not? Forks, spoons and knives cavort across the stage as the singing candelabra Lumiere (Hassan Nazari-Robati) presents the beautiful Belle (Hilary Maiberger) with the dinner of a lifetime.

It begins with singing, dancing flatware and culminates in an air cannon that shoots colorful streamers at the audience as two larger-than-life champagne bottles spew jets of steam into the air. This scene, like most in this production, seems to be straight out of the movie. However, the talented cast of “Beauty and the Beast” has given a new flavor to the well-worn story of a young girl winning the heart of a beast.

While this musical may at first seem like a carbon copy of the animated Disney film, one soon notices the obvious differences. Number One: due to humanity’s enslavement to gravity, the actors who play the various forks, knives and rugs cannot twirl and zip through the air around Belle’s head. Number Two: As there are no known enchantresses in the Baltimore area, an actual transformed Beast and various assorted cutlery are not an option. Number Three: real wolves, such as those in the forest scene, are not allowed on stage. And lastly, stages are only so big, so rolling plains, sprawling castles and terrifying precipices have to make do with backdrops, scrims and projections.

However, these differences do not detract from the experience; they add to it. Movies, such as “Beauty and the Beast,” are obviously unreal scenarios because of the flying, magic and whatnot. But theater can take the impossible and mold it into something almost believable.

The plates do not fly, but the skill of choreographers and dancers can make it seem as if they do. The Beast has tangible fur and features, unlike the 2-D movie’s Beast who can be dismissed as a genetic impossibility. Puppeteers also maneuver into this story when the prince is cursed by the enchantress. Everyone has seen the old beggar-woman-removes-cloak-and-is-actually-pretty trick. Not everyone has seen a 15-foot-tall enchantress puppet flash on stage and loom over the prince intimidatingly as she casts her spell.

The vicious wolves in the forest scene are life-sized puppets and handled with a skill that makes them look real, and the overall effect is very impressive. Yes, they are not real, but they are creative, imaginative and completely satisfactory visually. The inventive approach to two very different scenes can actually be considered a step above the movie, simply for the artistic vision employed in their execution. The white animals on sticks allow us to believe wolves are on stage, while enjoying the art of puppetry.
The sets and props are skillfully placed and maneuvered to contribute to the illusion of huge spaces. The magic of this play is you can lose yourself in the possibility the story could happen, while appreciating the creative genius of the director, Rob Roth.

All the beloved characters return with delightful twists to their original film personalities. Lumiere, the jovial host, has a tad more adult humor than his animated counterpart, visible and audible enough to be funny and subtle enough to pass over the heads of the younger, shorter and less-observant audience members. Belle loses some of her helpless-female act and emerges more as the clever, independent heroine she is meant to be.

Actor Darick Pead (The Beast) exhibits a more realistic portrayal of the Beast than the film’s tormented monster, who was initially terrifying and downright mean. Pead’s interpretation depicts the Beast as more whiny and inconsiderate, characteristics that tie back to the reason the Beast was initially punished by the enchantress and thus adding depth to his character.

The story begins in Belle’s “poor provincial town,” which she longs to escape so she can experience the adventure she reads about in her beloved books. She lives with her inventor father, who is considered crazy by most of the village for his eccentric ideas and nonsensical contraptions. Belle, too, is considered “odd” by the village because of her love of books and tendency to think for herself. However “odd” she may be, Belle is beautiful and is desired by the stud of the village, a conceited strongman named Gaston (Joe Hager,) whose proposals of marriage she is constantly turning down.

When her father is imprisoned by a terrifying Beast after getting lost in the woods, Belle frees him by offering to take his place in the monster’s dungeons. She soon learns the castle is inhabited by living household objects, including the candelabra Lumiere and the clock Cogsworth (James May), who treat her as their honored guest. Belle eventually learns to love the Beast, who is actually a cursed prince, doomed to remain a hideous beast until he can love another and that person can love him in return. After overcoming the rage and jealousy of Gaston, who angrily convinces the villager to attack the castle and kill the Beast, Belle confesses her feelings for the Beast.

The play begins by revealing a perfect storybook town. Little house facades painted with bright colors and the exaggerated detail of Disney roll around on wheels as the numerous citizens of Belle’s town constantly peer out of windows and emerge from built-in doors. The floor is painted with scroll-like flourishes which add to the experience of the audience entering a book. Once again, it’s not a real town like in the movie, but the integral elements of a town are embodied in a few tastefully decorated and positioned cottages and props.

The Beast’s castle constantly changes as the musical progresses, moving from the dining room to Belle’s room, from the Beast’s balcony to the dungeon with seamless transitions that allow the audience to become completely absorbed in the story. In one scene, Belle explores the Beast’s castle and effortlessly climbs a winding staircase, a very neat illusion created by gargoyles rotating each of two staircases, so once Belle was finished climbing one the other would roll to the front for her continued ascent.
The lyrics written by the gifted Howard Ashman and Tim Rice and put to music by Alan Menken have been memorized by children all over the country. They are performed with the proficiency and emotion of a fantastic cast. Gaston positively oozes arrogance and narcissism during songs such as “Me” and “Gaston,” while Mrs. Potts (Erin Edelle) delivers “Beauty and the Beast” clearly and with control. “Home (Reprise),” sung by Maiberger, is full of the conflicting pain and joy Belle must feel as she realizes she is in love with the dying Beast.

“Beauty and the Beast” is a timeless tale given new life by the talented actors, fanciful set detail, prop ingenuity and the flawless delivery of the musical score. This play is recommended for anyone who is a child or doesn’t mind becoming one for two and a half hours. However, be prepared to hum “Be Our Guest” the entire ride home, because it will get stuck in your head. “Be our guest, be our guest, da da da . . . .”

“Disney's Beauty and the Beast”

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By Laura Ebsworth

IT AIN'T "BAROQUE," DON'T FIX IT!

The script for the stage version of "Disney's Beauty and the Beast," now at the Hippodrome Theatre, is a wonderfully executed adaptation of the movie. The execution by the director and actors, however, is unacceptably below par. When a show's title includes the Disney name, one's expectations are much higher, and the scant amount of thought placed into everything from the overpowering designs to the unenthusiastic performances send the show’s quality plunging from spectacular to nondescript. Like they are with everything, young kids will be in awe of the performance, but everyone else will be better off watching the movie or sleeping.

The production team makes ample attempts to differentiate their interpretation from one of the most popular Disney fairytales of all time. While their goal is understandable from a marketing standpoint, the team should have focused on how they might improve on past versions. After their ideas were set, they then should have made editing the top priority of their to-do list before they constructed the physical aspects of the show.

Editing of their idea would have given the production team the perfect opportunity to eliminate aspects of their design that detract from their overall vision such as the un-needed swirls on the set floor or the way-too-long leaf overhang from the ceiling of the stage. In turn, they would have built less, saved money and been left with a visually appealing design.

The cast still might have saved the show despite the bad designs all around them if only they had avoided some obvious mistakes in portraying their characters. When playing classic characters, there is a fine line between relying too heavily on the original and making the characters so
different that they're unrecognizable. The actors with some of the biggest roles stray too far from the traditional interpretation of their character and make careless choices.

Gaston (Joe Hager) is somewhat recognizable from the movie, but Hager plays him with such an inappropriate flamboyance that ruins the tough, lumberjack image everyone has grown to love. In his first attempt to make Belle his wife, Hager stands outside her door and projects a girlish swagger that belittles his character's reputation from the first moment he steps on stage, yells Belle's name and opens Maurice's door with his right leg in arabesque to his pouty lines following Belle's rejection of his proposal.

The Beast (Darick Pead) strays so off base from the original that his entire performance resembles a "Saturday Night Live" skit with Bill Hader playing the Beast. In Act 2 when Belle reads him a story, Pead reacts to what she reads with loud, over-exaggerated interpretations of his lines in attempt to get a laugh from the audience. Pead's intention of lightening up his character can be viewed as reasonable, but the execution of the idea turns the Beast into a mockery that should not even be associated with the original

Belle (Hilary Maiberger) decides to do nothing whatsoever with her role and instead plays Belle like any run-of-the-mill high school student would in their school's production. From the moment she makes her first appearance in the village scene to the falling of the curtain in Act 2, Maiberger simply strolls around the stage, apparently unaware she has to tell a story with her performance.

Her ignorance is strongest in the opening scenes of the story during "Belle." Since these scenes are the first time the audience is introduced to her character and her struggles, Maiberger should be commanding presence when she's on stage and sing her lines with the conviction and purpose necessary for the audience to pick up on what struggles will drive her character's decisions throughout the story. Instead, on key lines such as "I want much more than this provincial life," Maiberger stares into the balcony with a deer-in-the-headlights look upon her face and an occasional sway of her torso.

The musical tells the ever-so-familiar love story between Belle and the Beast. He is not an animal, but a prince that has been turned into a beast by a witch's spell. The only way to lift the spell is for someone to learn to love him for who he is. Belle meets the Beast when she finds her father (William A. Martin), whom the Beast has taken captive, in his castle. In order to spare Maurice's life, Belle agrees to take his place as the Beast's prisoner.

With some encouragement from enchanted castle servants like Mrs. Potts (Erin Edelle), Lumiere (Hassan Nazari-Robati) and Cogsworth (James May), the Beast and Belle learn how to treat each other. Unsurprisingly, the more time the two spend together, the more they start to fall in love with each other; that is, when they are not interrupted by characters like Gaston, who intends to make Belle his wife whether she likes it or not.

The most frustrating part of the production is Stanley Meyer's set design. Meyer has a clever concept; he designed everything to appear like a pop-up story book, from Maurice's house to the
stairs in the Beast's castle. This idea is a wonderful way to translate a children's fairytale vibe to the audience.

The problem lies in its execution. The stage floor is a bright florescent blue covered in large tan swirls, and it is paired with busy backgrounds such as the multiple fields and animals in the village scenes or the large, baby-blue mesh pattern on the castle backdrop. Further adding to the clutter are multiple, two-dimensional set pieces such as the library in the castle or Martin's machine (which, due to poor color choices, blends right into the background behind it), in addition to all of the different elaborately detailed costumes. Seeing so many focal points at once distracts the audience from the story being told and they instead start to fixate on the different colors and textures of the inanimate objects on stage.

This distraction is heightened further for those sitting in the upper balcony, which is about one third to one half of the audience, since they are looking down at the stage at a larger angle than the rest of the audience. These audience members are even more aware of the floor design and in turn pay even less attention to details than audience members in closer seats.

Upper-balcony audience members are at greater disadvantage when it comes to viewing scenes that take place on the top of the castle stairs (for example Gaston's death scene or the scene where Belle discovers the West Wing) because a detailed leaf border that hangs from the top half of the stage blocks their view. Considering that it is common knowledge that this show will be performing at venues with steep upper balconies such as the Hippodrome, Meyer most certainly should have taken into account how his creations look from a bird's eye view.

The children's storybook concept is carried so far that it also undermines the acting. Many of the characters over-exaggerate their motions and performance in an effort to play to the children in the audience. While this technique is necessary to keep the children's attention, some actors exaggerate to the point where they are no longer acting and are merely pairing vast, pointless facial expressions with their lines.

The worst perpetrator is Jimmy Larkin as Lefou. Although his character is meant to provide comic relief in his scenes with Hager, he over-exaggerates his slapstick to the point where it is no longer realistic but just something he is doing with his face and body. It's apparent he desperately wants to make the children laugh at him, but there has to be a balance between over-the-top acting and truthful reactions, and Larkin's scale is top-heavy.

Many of the characters relied too heavily on the blocking of the songs to tell their story. Instead of moving with a defined purpose, they only move when and where they were told to by director Rob Roth to hit musical accents in the song. Apathetic movement by actors results in apathetic acting because actors not thinking about what would make their character want to move results in actors not thinking about what they are singing which results in mediocre songs.

For example, in "A Change In Me," Maiberger is so scared to move before she is supposed to that she almost halts each time she finishes, and when she is early, she either frantically looks around or moves her arms in a way to take up the time before her next blocking cue. The lyrics of that song are so rich in meaning; she is telling the story of how love has made her blossom
into a different and better person. This subtext could spark great passion and purpose behind her movements, but the cliché finish of slowly bringing her arms up into the air on the last note makes it more than clear that she does not think about what she is actually singing at any point in the song.

Some of the big staple numbers of "Beauty and the Beast" lack the energy and enthusiasm expected of them. In "Human Again," all of the enchanted objects act as if they were trying to not get their hopes up over the Beast and Belle's newly found love. It strikes one as an odd acting choice because in their situation where they have a real chance of having their lives go back to normal, one would think that the characters would be bouncing off the walls in excitement. Also, a high-energy number would serve as a nice contrast to all of the ballads that make up the rest of Act 2 because it would be the only number of its kind featured in the act.

A big letdown was "Be Our Guest." Every actor, even Nazari-Robati, sang the number with a lighthearted air. This directional choice is very peculiar considering that "Be Our Guest" is the biggest and most elaborate company number in the entire show. The actors should be bursting with enthusiasm over having a human, especially a girl that could save their lives, to serve and entertain in the castle with them.

Instead, the audience sees bright (and distracting) neon-pink curtains that reveal a busier plate-filled background accompanied with dozens of dancers performing in utensil costumes around two large champagne bottles that emit confetti. Maybe the fog and streamers are there to mask the number's lack of zest; maybe it is the director's stylistic choice; maybe it's that these actors have performed this number one too many times in their lives. Either way one views a disheartening version of what is one of the most recognizable and beloved Disney songs.

All of the characters talk and sing as if they are afraid to max out their mics. No one loudly projects their voice, and although what they are saying is somewhat audible, it's not as loud as one would expect. The audience has to focus on almost every word in order to truly hear and understand what is happening. Not only does the lack of projection affect the audience's understanding but also the acting of the characters. Instead of the actors focusing on how much emotion they can put into their words, they fixate on how loud they are being which causes them to not give 100% into the performance of their character.

May is most affected by the lack of volume. He has the recognizable Cogsworth accent from the movie down, but he barely projects into his mic so it is too hard for the audience to clearly comprehend his lines and too hard for him to put emotion into the parts of the story he's telling, such as the scene where Martin first enters the castle. The audience can't get a good impression of May because his performance ultimately becomes bland and unmemorable since he is inaudible.

The volume is missed most in the musical numbers, notably "If I Can't Love Her." Pead has a beautiful tenor voice that fits the Beast's songs very well; unfortunately, his mic isn't loud enough for the audience to understand every word he's saying unless he crescendos until the audience only really hears the melody.
Mic problems are a common theme in the show, though; Hager started having issues in the middle of "Gaston" and the issues continued through his death scene in Act 2. His mic is one of the loudest (most likely because he projects the most), but during "Gaston" his mic quality became one like he was under water. His problem is a soundboard issue rather than a mic issue, meaning that the sound designer (John Petrafesa, Jr.) or whoever is operating the soundboard must have either accidentally moved a control or turned a dial where Hager's mic is connected which automatically caused his issue.

The national tour of "Disney's Beauty and the Beast" includes everything one would expect: the beloved storyline, an almost identical script to the movie's, the magical transformation of the Beast into a prince (which, thanks to the same people who create illusions for David Copperfield, happens right before the audience's eyes) and the beautiful, catchy music that make Disney's version famous.

Unfortunately, NETworks Presentations also includes distracting and disappointing features such as a hanging border around the stage that blocks scenes from half of the Balcony, actors lacking an understanding of the fine line between making original choices and messing with the classics and a set that's so busy and colorful that one doesn't know where to look.

All of that aside, if a child is old enough to sit in a seat for two and a half hours without having a fit, take them to the Hippodrome Theatre by February 3 to see the show because it will blow them away. But, all Disney fanatics and fairytale-haters should stay home, because seeing this version will only disappoint.

“Disney's Beauty and the Beast”
By Linda Woolverton, Alan Menken, Howard Ashman and Tim Rice

At the Hippodrome Theatre through February 3
By Sierra Farrare

A CLASSIC TALE, RESPUN WITH GOLDEN THREAD

When I saw “Disney's Beauty and the Beast at the Hippodrome through February 3rd,” on the cover of my Playbill, I was very wary; this is probably my favorite Disney film of all time and I did not want to be disappointed. The story of the two unlikely lovers is endearing for a number of reasons. Belle, a beautiful young girl who loves to read and explore through her novels but felt trapped and out of place in her small hometown, finally got the adventure she’d been craving—and ended up with more than she bargained for.

I, too, have craved adventure and yearned to escape from the same town, the same people and the same places. Even as a child, I could sing along with every song in the movie and relate. Beast is probably the last person thought of to be well-suited for the eccentric beauty, and I once more related. Being bullied and viewed as different from a very young age, I picked up on this common thread in both characters and clung to it. This movie made me, and hopefully many
other young children, realize that being different is okay and yes, it is what’s on the inside that counts.

I got to my seat with plenty of time, paper and pen in hand, completely ready to tear the production apart for its every misstep or failure. But as the theater darkened, the curtain rose and the orchestra began to play, I found myself writing nothing but complimentary statements about the production, its actors, lighting and everything else in between. The writers did a phenomenal job of retaining memorable dialogue and punch-lines and removing less important details, while still maintaining a plot similar to the one outlined in the Disney movie. There were just enough changes to the script that this stage production was not just an imitation; and there were few enough changes that production stays true to the film.

Flipping through my Playbill in the darkened theater, I notice on the “Musical Numbers and Scenes” page that six songs have been added to the original list of songs. Once more I found myself feeling wary—are these going to be weak, unnecessary additions to this cherished story? When the first “new” song began to play, I found myself nearly biting my lip out of nerves. In “Home,” Belle wonders how she’ll ever be able to abandon everything she knew and, admittedly, took for granted to now call this dark desolate castle home.

In this song, you get a peek into the emotion any real person would feel if they were suddenly dragged from everything they knew. This is also something that was not touched on in the Disney movie, most likely because its targeted young audience would not be able to fathom the weight of this emotion. An emotion that was simply touched upon in the classic children’s film is strengthened at an appropriate time in the story, making this new song successful, rather than just being a shot in the dark. This song also touches on themes that most of the older audience might be going through currently—homesickness upon moving away to college or getting a new job.

The musical starts with the narration from the movie, word for word, telling the tale of how the prince (Darick Pead) became the Beast. An ominous smoke effect and nearly non-existent lighting are subtle touches that only enhance the serious introductory scene. An attractive flaxen man with an ugly heart is transformed into snarling beast in a matter of seconds, all for refusing to do a single act of kindness. Though I find myself nearly cringing at the puppet used for the sorceress, it is something I can bring myself to ignore as the scene comes to a close.

Then, immediately, the musical shifts gears; the scene is now set in a small town in France, the home of our heroine, Belle (Hilary Maiberger). The town around her is hustling and bustling, seemingly going about their morning routine. The tone of the song quickly shifts to discuss how odd this beautiful girl is; the beautiful Belle wants nothing more than to get away from the critical eyes and attentive ears of her all-too-familiar neighbors. This theme is later picked up on once Belle returns home and explains to her father how she feels different, from everyone else.

One of the strongest aspects of this stage production is its ability to create successful, logical additions that make the story more relevant for an older audience. The story most knew as a child has been deepened just enough that it’s enjoyable while still being lighthearted. Belle’s father tells her the story of how he felt quite the same when he was no older than her, before he met her.
mother. This story is told in passing in the 1991 Disney film, but on stage the story comes to life with a few extra details and a nostalgic orchestral arrangement to tie everything up with a bow.

“Be our guest, be our guest, tie your napkin ‘round your neck, mon chere, and we provide the rest,” sang Lumiere (Hassan Nazari-Robati) during the most iconic scene of the beloved Disney classic turned stage production. Lumiere—as well as his full ensemble—deliver an exciting, engaging musical number that cements this musical as my favorite theatrical production.

Swirling lights, energetic vocals and a vibrant setting all throw me back into the depths of the movie I loved more than anything as a child. The inability to suspend hundreds of dancers in midair was cleverly circumvented through the usage of an ensemble that took up the width of the stage, strong vocals and scenery that was a near mirror-image of the Disney movie.

On her first night in the castle, Beast requests that Belle joins him for dinner and she refuses; the Beast loses his temper, and the cast brings the characteristic playful Disney humor to life on the stage when Beast struggles to say a simple word, ‘please.’ In the movie, this is an important scene in the exposition of the story that establishes the Beast’s true nature as that of a bratty child, despite his intimidating appearance. With a two-dimensional movie, there is no crowd interaction; it is simply a moving picture before an audience. But Pead took advantage of the reality of a stage production and gave a slight turn of the body; the small gesture engaging the audience in the moment of humor.

As the story unfolded before me—Belle and the Beast falling in love, him ultimately letting her go to see her father, the mob coming, Belle returning to save the day—I find myself falling in love with the story all over again as if I were seeing it for the first time. This adaptation provided nostalgic familiarity by sticking fairly close to the original script but renewed the tale and gave it a fresh, endearing feeling through ample comic relief and the addition of serious though relatable new themes. Those who grew up with the story will be able to appreciate the slight maturation in the humor; those just being introduced to the story as children will enjoy it and parents won’t cringe at the destruction of a beloved story.

“Disney's Beauty and the Beast”

By Linda Woolverton, Alan Menken, Howard Ashman and Tim Rice
At the Hippodrome Theatre through February 3

By Ben Fisher

ANYTHING BUT BEASTLY

One of the great things about musical theater is that the script can be awful and the songs can be cheesy, but if the actors seem like they are having fun then the production succeeds. Luckily for “Beauty and the Beast” at the Hippodrome Theater, the songs and story are, for the most part, enjoyable. The energetic and committed performances from both the leads and ensemble are just the icing on the cake. True numerous little girls ran about in their Belle costumes, but “Beauty
and the Beast” does not take itself too seriously and has no need to.

The story stays true to the original movie. A young girl yearns to escape the monotony of her small town and the insufferable inhabitants who mock her intelligence. When her father gets lost in the woods one night and is taken captive by a beast in a castle, she takes it upon herself to rescue him. In this attempt she trades places with her father and discovers the castle is not what it seems. Behind the eerie looks is a group of former servants turned into talking objects, a witch’s curse and a beastly man seeking true love.

The stage show is sure to be compared to the movie, and the adaption was quite faithful. The script’s modifications will appeal more to adults by adding sexualized characters and jokes that go right over the younger audiences’ heads. But the innocence of the show is not lost; it is still a Disney production and therefore these little moments thrown into the script do not reflect badly on the production as a whole. Lumiere’s (Hassan Nazari-Robati) comical advances on Babette (Jessica Lorion), for example, humanizes the characters who are at a point of their lives where their humanity is waning, all the more adding to the plot’s tension.

The recreation of the wolf-chase scene and the finale are to be commended, as they were the trickiest scenes to transfer from film to stage. A film, especially an animated film, has the benefit of creating life-like and complex scenes with relative ease and does not have to rely on the kind of suggestion needed to pull off the same scenes on stage. In each case, that suggestion is supplied by a darkness-enhancing scrim and the clever use of puppets, such as the wolves depicted by rug-like puppets supported below by two cast members clad in black.

The overall set, though, is at first slightly underwhelming. The painted vines that surround the stage like the frame of the picture are reminiscent of curtains one would find in a grandmother’s dining room. The background is a curious backdrop of red fields and deer, in a different style than the rest of the set. The houses are small sheets of wood on wheels, but that ultimately seems necessary due to the amount of fast set changes in the show. Fortunately, the cast remains the focus of the show with big, exaggerated characters.

The leads are wonderful, all except the Maurice (William A. Martin) who has a very awkward stage presence and delivery of lines. Perhaps this is because he seems so young and made little effort to sound like an elderly man, creating some weird scenes between him and Belle (Hilary Maiberger). Luckily he does not have many scenes to himself and the other members of the cast were able to outshine him.

As Belle, Maiberger is a magnificent lead, with all the dignity and charisma of a true Disney princess, and a lovely, sweet voice as well. Despite all of the show’s strong characters she is able to hold her own, especially by the end where no one ever forgets she is the star as she sweeps across the stage in the character’s iconic gold dress.

Gaston (Joe Hager) is perfectly macho, holding his head high and adopting a wide-legged stance throughout the entire show, befitting this overly confident hunter. His impish accomplice Lefou (Jimmy Larkin) adopts his role as the funny buffoon full heartedly and has all the kids laughing with his falling and moaning. Over the course of the play, the stage slapstick of rolling around on
the ground grows a bit weary, though.

Beast (Darick Pead) is great as well, and is given more stage time than in the movie, and the more in-depth look to the character was enjoyable. In this version, Beast is truly a brat, annoying and temperamental when things don’t go his way, though he was charming enough for the character to still seem appealing and Pead easily transitioned through his many moods. One moment the Beast grudgingly asks Belle to come to dinner and the next is hilariously trying to say, “Please” in earnest. Pead milks these moments for all they are worth, causing uproar from the audience.

The musical numbers are just as grand as in the film, maybe even more so for the bigger numbers like “Gaston” and “Be Our Guest.” The latter is particularly impressive for as its many dancers clad in bright gold dance in sync on stage, cannons rain streams of confetti on top of the crowd. Some of the new, musical-only numbers, such as “Home” and “If I Can’t Love Her,” however, are less impressive than the originals. The hooks are less catchy, and the lyrics seem little more than internal monologues set to music for fast plot exposition.

Overall, “Beauty and the Beast” is a faithful adaption that keeps to the original story but with enough justified and welcomed modifications that it doesn’t seem like a complete replication. The greatest difference remains the jump from animation to live action, but the actors meet this challenge with enthusiasm and over-the-top performances. The cast is electric and the amount of character work was impressive. They all seem to be having a blast on stage, and the audience responded in turn.

“Disney's Beauty and the Beast”

By Linda Woolverton, Alan Menken, Howard Ashman and Tim Rice
At the Hippodrome Theatre through February 3

By Theron Mercadel II

MORE BEAUTY THAN BEAST

The current Hippodrome Theatre production of the Broadway musical “Beauty and the Beast” retained the original movie’s key elements: the oblivious jock, the unloving brute, the headstrong dame and all of the talking furniture. In animation, work created for children has always been highly esteemed, largely because that is where animation began. In contrast, other artistic work for children does not always hold the same respect.

Normally, children’s theater is scoffed at as though it does not require a lot of acting talent or discipline. This group of actors did quite a job of disproving this idea. The stage musical’s characters remained very true to the movie’s in voice and mannerism, while providing new insights into human nature.

Hassan Nazari-Robati (Lumiere) did a particularly good job of embodying the flaws of his character. Lumiere was the epitome of passion and romance. His relationship with Babette, his
feather-duster lover, is much clearer in the live performance than in the movie. In the stage performance, more moments were dedicated to them than in the movie. The added substance of this relationship provides a revealing contrast to Belle and the Beast’s. The flirting between Lumiere and Babette is lustful, sultry and perhaps immoral. Messages of modesty and chastity are added to the mix.

In other words these characters are more complex and raise more issues than those in simple children’s fables. This does not negate the intended message of the original— that beauty is determined by a person’s spirit and character rather than their physical appearance—but the sexy innuendos deepen the theme for the parents and grandparents in the audience.

Arguably the best part of the Disney princess series is the music. Hilary Maiberger (Belle) never misses a note in her solo “Something There.” Her voice never wavered when she thrust out the powerful melodies in her solos. To hear the orchestrated music of violins and cellos in harmony with a sweet voice in the stead of strange instruments and choruses of the “Doodlebops” or “Barney and Friends” was supremely refreshing. Even if one can’t fully appreciate vibrato or other vocal techniques—most adults let alone children can’t—someone singing sweetly will still soothe them.

For those unfamiliar with the tale, “Beauty and the Beast” is the story of Belle, a girl from a French village, who longs for something more than the parochial life. Being exquisite, she is pursued by Gaston (Joe Hager), the alpha male of the village. Her father leaves the village on a journey to an inventor’s competition, but finds himself captive in the Beast’s dungeon. Belle finds her father and offers herself as ransom. While she is held captive, Gaston eventually attempts to have Belle’s father committed to an asylum in an attempt to become closer to Belle.

Arguably the best parts of the show were the transitions. In two or three seconds of darkness the stage or costumes would totally rearrange and change into completely different items. Naturally, the best was Beast’s instant transition from prince to beast and back to Prince. To see him spin and levitate what appeared to be 10-15 feet in the air had me nearly believing in magic. Even if one was phlegmatic about the other transitions that one would have stunned anyone.

Gaston, a pillar character in the first act, was serious and threatening, as in the original, but very silly. He would sing a song or have a line that clearly exhibited his bigotry, but right after it he would have the entire audience laughing. This sugar-coating of Gaston’s character defeated the purpose of his addition.

Gaston’s purpose was to draw attention to the fact that there are men in the real world that are tormenting and bullying this way. This message is not carried through if no one in the audience takes him seriously. Of course a children’s show is not meant to stir a riot of pitchforks and torches in a war against social injustice, but it is written so that parents can talk to their children more easily about these issues. If the audience walks away laughing then none of them gained anything.

A similar discrepancy was Belle’s appearance at the end of the show. It was accepted by her whole village that she was the prettiest around, even with her straight hair and plain dress. Still,
after Beast’s transformation she morphed into the typical powdered, tight-curled female stereotype she had previously defied. If she was already attractive, in body as well as character what purpose did her shift hold? What did it represent?

With all the focus on Beast’s deformity we never appreciated Belle’s natural beauty. The fact that it was forgotten or completely skimmed over in a piece primarily about Beauty is a statement itself about feminism. Instead of following her own heart through the end, she conformed to match her husband for absolutely no reason. From this it appeared that compliance is natural. Like any great work of art this is the fatal flaw. Critics often find glaring errors in the greatest works of Shakespeare and Moliere, so it should expected that there is some fault in this work.

With that said, the bonding of Belle and the Beast over their similar eccentricities greatly aided the theme of acceptance. It proved that there is a reward and companionship for those that choose to disobey societal codes. Who would choose to be different if they thought that it only meant loneliness, desperation, and woe because of it?

The transformation of the vain prince into the ambiguous monster suggested that no person, not even the richest or mightiest of royalty, is above being humble or gracious. There is a punishment for hurting others that comes in several ways. While simple ideas, they are cornerstones for all levels of society. Though they are expressed in a medium planned for children there is a small plethora of them that are not watered down to below basic levels. This show is a step up from the “Dora the Explorer” and “Blue’s Clues” because it does not explicitly name the themes, so children and adults alike can apply them fittingly in their own lives.

One issue in the writing is that we never learned Beast’s true name. When two people form any kind of bond, even the shallowest, a name is the first thing people share. A person’s name represents the essence of an identity and the relationship between two people. The intonation a person uses in calling someone is at times the greatest indicator of the emotions that individual feels. If a person goes through a major transformation, yet their nickname does not reflect it then everyone is still dwelling on it. In a way the Beast was objectified never to regain the status of a human, because the smallest fragment of his humanity was never recognized.

Though “Beauty and the Beast” delivers mixed themes it does entertain. Children will definitely leave the theater wide-eyed and giggling. It does impart a deal of the true essence of the original while using solely theatrical elements to its advantage. No parent or grandparent in the audience will be checking their phones waiting for it to end, because the art the show creates is so enveloping. It manages to teach morals in a suitable format, while not insulting anyone’s intelligence. (Children are more perceptive than we give them credit for being.)

“Disney's Beauty and the Beast”

By Linda Woolverton, Alan Menken, Howard Ashman and Tim Rice
At the Hippodrome Theatre through February 3
TALE AS OLD AS TIME

People of all ages—from young girls dressed up as princesses to adults reminiscing about their childhood—shuffle excitedly into their seats as they prepare to watch the classic Disney show “Beauty and the Beast” at the Hippodrome Theatre. Logan Denninghoff begins to narrate the prologue as the stage is lit to unveil the set that looks like a scene from a children’s storybook brought to life. Although this opening scene makes the audience feel as though they have stepped into a real-life storybook rather than a theater, it doesn’t feel as though the magic truly begins until close to the end of the first act.

But like a football team that plays poorly early on in the game, regroups during halftime and makes a comeback in the second half, the production returns from intermission a lot stronger. This is made evident through the significant improvements in body language and vocal projection. This shift in tone is contagious and influences the rest of the cast to perform better while the set and costume designs, dance choreography and orchestra performance remain spectacular.

What exactly makes the first act such a weak performance? For one, the actors do not express—and therefore do not evoke—emotions as strong as one would expect from such a classic Disney show and a well-known touring Broadway production. The opening scene is supposed to capture the audience’s attention from the start; however, this show instead gives the audience more time to sit and wait for a performance that will blow them away.

A Young Prince well known for being “spoiled, selfish and unkind” sneers and sends away an Enchantress disguised as a beggar who has offered him a rose in exchange for shelter. As punishment for not listening to her advice about how “beauty is found within,” she puts a spell on the castle and transforms him into an ugly Beast. There is nothing about the young prince’s movements—or lack thereof—that explains these events. As the prince, Tony D’Alelio stands stiffly onstage, which may indicate his authority as a person of power, but his actions don’t show a man “with no love in his heart.”

Similarly, another flaw early in the first act is Hilary Maiberger’s body language as she plays one of the main characters, Belle. While she is able to portray her awkward and somewhat nerdy personality as she stiffly and uncomfortably walks around town with her “nose stuck in a book,” she fails to express strong emotion during otherwise heartwarming scenes. For example, when Gaston (Joe Hager) and Lefou (Jimmy Larkin) insult her father, Maurice (William A. Martin)—the one person she cares about deeply—she doesn’t show her anger and frustration at them through her movements—or lack thereof. She stands stiffly as though she is not offended by Gaston and Lefou’s remarks that her father is weird and crazy.

As Belle heads to the bookshop, the townspeople perform “Belle” and sing about how she is “so peculiar… with a dreamy, far-off look.” Although Maiberger exhibits being “peculiar” through her stiff and uncomfortable movements mentioned earlier, she fails to show a “dreamy, far-off look.” She brings her book close to her face and tucks herself in as though she wants to be alone
rather than displaying a sense of longing to travel and experience new adventures. When she confides in her father about her displeasure at living in a town where she feels unwelcome, she pulls her father close to sit next to her on the well in such a manner that makes her seem happy and giddy instead of upset.

Fortunately, what Maiberger lacks in body language, she makes up for in excellent vocal projection. When she speaks and sings, the tone of her voice conveys the strong emotion her body fails to display. Belle raises concern when Lefou flaunts a red scarf he finds in the woods—the same red scarf she gives to her father before he leaves for an invention fair. She becomes increasingly worried knowing he is in danger.

She finds him locked in a dungeon in the enchanted castle and makes a bargain with the Beast: if her father is set free, she will remain in the castle to take his place. When she performs “Home,” one can hear a strong sense of longing in her voice as Belle is trapped. It is evident through the melancholy yet slightly hopeful tones that she wants nothing more than to return home to her father, and she has not given up hope that this is still possible.

As the Beast, Darick Pead’s performance is weak for reasons opposite to Maiberger’s; his angry and aggressive personality is displayed through his body language, but his vocal projection is lacking. Throughout the play, his first few words during a scene often sound as though Pead goes out of character.

When the Beast first learns of Maurice’s presence, he is extremely angered. He has concealed himself in the castle since it was cursed; he surely is not welcoming of outsiders. Unfortunately, one won’t hear his fury when his voice is first heard. He initially speaks in a normal human voice that has a slight undertone of being upset though he is supposed to be intimidating. His horrifying and angry personality only shines through after he growls in his raspy and aggressive voice after a few words.

When does the production reach its turning point from a weak show to a strong one? Nine musical numbers and scenes from when the curtains open, something happens that finally forces one to sit a little straighter and open one’s eyes a little wider. A beautiful town scene is made even more vibrant as Gaston, Lefou and the Silly Girls (Taylor D. Coleton, Amanda Grace Hold and Stephanie Moskal) vividly perform “Gaston.” In contrast to Maiberger and Pead, Hager and Larkin project their characters strongly through both body language and facial expressions.

Hager walks boldly and boastfully across the stage to assert his impudence and speaks in an overly confident tone as though he were a suave ladies’ man. Larkin portrays Lefou’s goofy character with his clumsy and eccentric movements, such as the way he stumbles and trips across the stage and speaks in a quirky, high-pitched voice. The orchestra plays lively and upbeat music as Gaston and Lefou are joined by the townspeople to perform a very well-coordinated dance choreographed by Connor Gallagher. They make seemingly mundane and boring actions such as clanging their old-school beer mugs and skipping around town look like the most fun anyone could have.
This is by far the show’s best scene due to the weak performances earlier in the first act. The energy of these strong performances seems to radiate contagiously to the rest of the cast. From this point on, the show is absolutely breathtaking. With the exception of Pead’s minor instances of losing character when he first speaks, the early flaws are adjusted.

The audience is transported to a rich ’20s party a la “The Great Gatsby.” With the gold color scheme, bright lights and flashy costumes, it’s hard for one’s attention to wander as Lumiere (Hassan Nazari-Robati), Mrs. Potts (Erin Edelle) and the Enchanted Objects perform one of the most popular pieces of the show, “Be Our Guest.” In this scene, it is evident how the musical number of “Gaston” has influenced the rest of the cast.

The Carpet is played by the same man who plays the Young Prince. Although he displayed such a dismaying lack of movement during the opening scene, D’Alelio comes back onstage to wow the audience. With the Carpet doing somersaults, dancers dancing can-can, giant plates and silverware frolicking and lights flashing towards the audience, it is very difficult to stay seated.

This can also be considered another turning point as characters begin to show a hint of development into different personas. For example, Cogsworth (James May) is initially reluctant to disobey the Beast’s orders and strongly opposes serving Belle a meal after she rejects dining with the Beast. During this musical number, however, he joins the others in making Belle feel welcome.

After the first half, even the technical issues begin to improve. Although Gaston’s mic is faulty during opening night, there are significant changes that make the show more movie-like in which equipment is shown less. During the opening scene, the equipment that is used to hold up the Enchantress is clearly visible; however, towards the end of the show, the Beast must transform back into a human being.

This seems a difficult task as he is visible to the audience as a Beast, but technical director Seth Larkin has a creative solution to this. When the Beast is lifted up for his transformation, the stage is blacked out, and bright lights shine at the audience. When the lights are back on, the Beast has transformed into his human form without the audience seeing.

The classic tale of “Beauty and the Beast” is retold through this touring Broadway production. A castle is placed under a curse due to the selfish Young Prince, and the spell is broken when this Beast falls in love with a beautiful girl named Belle and vice-versa. Despite the significantly weaker performance during the early first act, a stronger one is presented after the performance of “Gaston.” This scene creates a ripple effect in which the rest of the cast begins to perform as strongly as those in the musical number.

Although this allows weaker performances, such as the Pead occasionally going out of character as the Beast, to be emphasized a little more, the performers’ stronger projection overshadows these. The significant improvement of the show allows the audience to feel the emotions that each character, each musical note and each touch of light.
“Disney’s Beauty and the Beast”

By Linda Woolverton, Alan Menken, Howard Ashman and Tim Rice
At the Hippodrome Theatre through February 3

By Deshaun Steele

THE BEAUTIFUL BEAST

During “Beauty and the Beast” at the Hippodrome Theatre, we are taken from our world of realism and sanity into an enchanted environment of mystical creatures and magic. This is the home of fairy tales and dreams, where boundaries are destroyed and anything is possible. You never know what to expect in this spontaneous world.

In this new world we encounter a young prince who has changed into the beast of “Beauty and the Beast” via a curse that will not be lifted until he has found true love. Throughout this tale you will encounter Belle, a young woman who lives with her father. A hunter by the name of Gaston desperately wants to marry Belle but she refuses. This is, of course, the plot of the classic Disney movie which has been turned into a smash hit Broadway musical.

The songs throughout this Broadway musical take us from our traditional home of sanity to the world of magic by using characters such as Belle to explain to us the priorities of citizens in this enchanted world. Easily noticeable differences in priorities, hopes and goals show us what makes us different from the world of fantasy. Throughout this tale few characters possess the ambition to fulfill long-term goals; they would rather pursue happiness.

Musical numbers such as “Belle,” “Home Again” and “Be Our Guest” give you the warmest feeling as though you are on the stage performing with the cast. Every musical number in “Beauty and the Beast” was brief enough to not lose the audience’s attention but long enough to satisfy us.

These songs all expressed an emotion or furthered along the plot. In one scene, for example, Gaston (Joe Hager) is having a difficult time getting Belle (Hilary Maiberger) to like him. So his goofy friend Lefou (Jimmy Larkin) explains why Gaston is such a great man and should not give up on pursuing Belle’s love. This demonstrated not only the strong relationship between Gaston and Lefou but also Gaston’s ridiculous ego. Unlike many musical numbers these songs all actually have meanings behind their humor and dialogue.

The dialogue between characters is so intriguing that they will persuade you that these cast members actually have a relationship behind the scenes. Although this story may be full of unrealistic characters and creatures, the deep, heartfelt conversations makes one wonder if this story could actually be true. In one scene, for example, The Beast (Darick Pead) gives Belle (Hilary Maiberger) a key to his library after she has explained her love for reading. When you see how thankful she is you feel as though you are watching this occur in someone’s home on Christmas Eve.
Throughout “Beauty and the Beast” many unique tools—puppets, tinting and moving stages—enhanced the setting complementing “Beauty and the Beast.” These tools are used to encourage the audience to believe that this image before them is reality and that belief isn’t challenged by clues such as cords holding actors in the air.

“Beauty and the Beast” uses a lot of puppets throughout the play to create movements that actors cannot express themselves. In one scene Maurice (William A. Martin) is lost in the forest and is attacked by three wolves which are large puppets. These aggressive puppets can jump, fall, dive and crawl as well as any actor.

Another valuable tool is the moving stages/objects. These help to change the setting quickly without hindering the audience’s imagination. For example, rather than using curtains or backdrops, known as slow transitions, objects that are already on the stage were adjusted. Thus a dining room can turn into a living room in a split second right before your eyes.

A small but invaluable tool is the shadowy scrim placed in front of the stage. This creates the idea that it is now night. It is also used so audience members will have a hard time seeing the puppeteers so the illusion will not be ruined. This illusion is so vivid that a detail as small as a quick glance sway of a puppeteers hand would ruin one’s imagination through the rest of the play.

The orchestra for “Beauty and the Beast” is one of among the many that have performed at the Hippodrome Theatre. This orchestra played so well that one may have to double-check to ensure it is not a recorded soundtrack from the actual movie. The orchestra controls the mood of the play smoothly introducing each plot development. If a depressing scene is approaching, for example, a slow and dark instrumental will prepare the audience.

This play is one of the greatest plays that have reached Broadway; from the orchestra to the plot there is no weakness. This is such a great adaptation that any fan of the movie will be a fan of this Broadway play. This upbeat and fast-paced transition from the world of reality to an enchanted world of mystical things is very rare and sets this Broadway musical aside from others. No other Broadway musical can give the audience this feeling of youth at any age.