

Beauty and the Beast entertaining for everyone

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Okay, kids, start clamouring. You really, really want to go to Disney's Beauty and the Beast, and here's your strongest selling point to convince the parental units: They'll have just as much fun as you.

It's great to attend an opening night and see lots of ankle-biters among all us old farts. One of the blessings of the Arts Club Theatre's holiday presentation of Disney's Beauty and the Beast is that this big and brassy production will convince kids of the many pleasures lurking in live theatre. While productions of The Nutcracker tend to draw moms and daughters, Disney's B&B can count on a much broader demographic -- boys and girls of all ages.

Bill Millerd directs a snappy show so rich with beautiful voices that it's almost impossible to know where to begin. Almost.

Amy Wallis shows superb control of her rich soprano as Belle, the heroine who will learn to love her hirsute captor. Belle and the Beast (Warren Kimmel) share a great show-closing duet, Wallis also shines in Something There and Home and she even lifts No Matter What, despite having to handle Bernard Cuffling's odd accompaniment. (Memo to Bernard: Yes, Belle's papa need not sing very well, but he has to stay on the beat.)

Kimmel roars, not only literally in an excellent take on the Beast's very physical anger, but musically as well. The tunes by Alan Menken are pretty and melodic but never especially challenging, with bits of faux Les Miz here and there and an echo of Jacques Brel's Sons Of in Human Again. Yet Kimmel still thrills with his singing, making even a key change memorable in If I Can't Love Her.

Matching Menken's middlebrow music are exceedingly simple lyrics by Howard Ashman and Tim Rice. While we grown-ups wait to sink our teeth into the rich verbiage lurking in an upcoming Playhouse production of Sondheim's A Little Night Music, we'll just have to sing along with the kids as Be Our Guest proclaims "no one's gloomy or complaining while the flatware's entertaining."

It's tough to present that show-

stopping number on the Stanley's narrow stage, but choreographer Valerie Easton still manages some snappy moves. And it doesn't hurt to have plenty of hammy support in the song from Matt Palmer as Lumiere the candlestick (hilariously note-perfect with his outrageous French accent) and Shawn Macdonald, threatening to burst a blood vessel as Cogsworth the clock.

The list of standouts goes on: Susan Anderson (she's a little teapot) singing the title song, Jonathan Winsby as haughty, handsome Gaston and Dan Costain as his suffering sidekick, Sara-Jeanne Hosie as cocky Babette and Dorothy Hosie as Madame de la Grande Bouche.

Kudos to music director Bruce Kellett and his hidden band for meeting the show's need to keep things happy and snappy, and to Alison Green for an enormous revolving set filled with many more surprises than anyone thought possible in the Stanley's tight backstage. Disney's Beauty and the Beast ain't lpsen, but it is a heck of a lot of fun for young or old.

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