

Fine Linen Drama
"Beauty and the Beast"
Oct. 1, 2015
Review by John Woodfin

Fine Linen's "Beauty and the Beast" is Charming and Magical

I have been attending the productions of Fine Linen Drama for many years. I have never been disappointed. Their talent, dedication to the art of theatre and attention to detail ensures a high quality theatrical production.

Fine Linen Drama's most recent youth production of Disney's "Beauty and the Beast" is no exception. It is an outstanding youth production by a cast and crew of approximately 50 youngsters, 13-25 years of age.

A lovely and charming story with music by Alan Menken; lyrics by Howard Ashman and Tim Rice; book by Linda Woolverton, "Beauty and the Beast" has entertained children and adults alike since it was first written by in 1756 by French novelist Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont. Entitled "La Belle et La Bête." It is the story of an arrogant yet handsome young prince who has been transformed into a beast by an enchantress disguised as an old beggar woman when she is turned away by the prince at his castle door after she has offered him a rose in exchange for shelter. The enchantress has also transformed his entire staff into household objects. The only way for the curse to be broken is for the beast to fall in love and to have his love returned before the last petal of the rose falls. This is a tall order considering the beast's appearance and unpleasant personality.

The ensemble is led by Director, Kim Nisbett, her husband Keith Nisbett (Set Designer), their son, Joel Nisbett (Musical Director), and daughter, Amy Hobbs (Costume Designer). Also designing costumes is Laura Cook with Cris Abbott and Josiah Nisbett on lighting. There are several choreographers involved with this production. Tracy McBride, Stephanie Hanson, Gabrielle Hanson, Joy Nisbett, Paul and Gessell Frisbee have created the dances for the production and the fight scene was staged and choreographed by David Chirban. These folks set the bar high and the cast and crew meet and exceed all expectations. It is a remarkable production with great acting, wonderful singing, well-executed dancing, and amazing sets, costumes and lights.

Anna Nisbett (Beauty aka Belle) and Steven Pfeifer (Beast) are wonderful in their respective title roles. Anna Nisbett creates a convincing and charming young Belle. She is a beautiful, innocent, tenacious and brave young woman who is considered odd by the people of the village because she loves books and has a vivid imagination. Belle wants to make the most of her life, while Steven Pfeifer's Beast is dark and brooding. Caught in an enchanted curse, the beast who was once handsome but conceited and cruel is now forced to live in this hideous form until he can break the curse by finding the love of a young woman who can transform his heart and break the curse. Steven does a fantastic job creating this character. I have often admired Steven's work in other Fine Linen Drama productions and his work in this production is equally inspiring. I could listen to him sing all day long. In fact, I could listen to both Anna and Steven sing all day long.

The other actors are equally talented. First time Fine Linen Drama performer, Austin Jones plays Gaston with great aplomb. He is wonderful as the arrogant and muscle bound hunk. It is difficult to believe that this is his first time acting on stage. He seems so comfortable and natural as he creates this vain young hunter who is determined to have Belle as his bride. He, along with Rebecca Light (LeFou) are a hysterical duo as they play off of each other with wonderful slap-stick humor. I couldn't keep my eyes off Rebecca Light's bumbling LeFou. I swear her face is made of rubber. She is a wonderful comedic actor.

Speaking of wonderful comedic actors, it was so nice to see Kate Bowra back on stage. Her performance as Monsieur D'Arque is short but memorable.

As mentioned earlier, the Beast's household staff have all been transformed into household objects by the enchantress. It is great fun to watch as the actors bring these iconic storybook characters to life. Lumiere, the candlestick (Nick Schaeffler), Cogsworth, the clock (Drew McCluskey), Mrs. Potts, the teapot (Laura Balch), Chip, the teacup (Jeremy Graber), Babette, the feather duster (Lauren Werkmeister) and Madame De La Grande Bouche, the chest of drawers (Bethany Pfeifer) are wonderful as their personified characters with great vocalizing and physicalizing as they attempt to assist and advance the romance between the Beast and Belle. Moving about the stage in those costumes can't always be easy.

The rest of the ensemble, play wolves, napkins, silverware, candles, pillars and townspeople. The energy they bring to these roles is electric. They sing beautifully, dance with joy and are always, "in the moment."

I love, love, love the set, costumes and lights. I am always amazed by what is accomplished by this group when it comes to the technical aspects of theatre production. Their designs are always creative and spectacular. They solve problems with such imagination. The set changes are executed in seconds with pieces that move on and off stage with precision. The projections that are used are very effective in establishing location and the lighting design equally effective in creating just the right mood.

It's a tale as old as time, true as it can be. A tale of love and its power to transform even the coldest heart to one filled with hope and joy.

"Beauty and the Beast," is a remarkable production. Be sure to see this production and be sure to take your children. This will be a great way to introduce them to live theatre. There is something for all ages.