

## NATIONAL OPERATIC AND DRAMATIC ASSOCIATION LONDON REGION

Society ; **Banbury Operatic Society**  
Production ; **"BEAUTY AND THE BEAST"**  
Date ; **Thursday 16th February 2012**  
Venue ; **Wykham Theatre, Banbury School**  
Report by ; **Henry Hawes - NODA Representative - Area 13**

On Thursday 16th February 2012, I was pleased to deputise for your regular NODA Rep', Gareth Jeremy, to review your latest production "*Beauty and the Beast*", performed at the Wykham Theatre, Banbury School. Having reviewed this show three times since its recent release, I was interested to see how this production compared to the others. I was not disappointed as it stood up very favourably, and in some aspects, surpassed the others. "*Beauty and the Beast*" is a wonderful Disney fantasy which has stood the test of time over many years, having originally been a play and then an animated film version, which, on its success the Disney Empire decided to turn it into a full stage musical, and what a musical. It contains all the elements of true theatre, magnificent sets, outstanding and outrageous costumes, a host of wonderful characters, together with a good story line and tuneful music. A show that appeals to all ages. The show had been well cast with excellent singing from both principals and chorus and the stage crew worked wonders with a big and complex set. This was a show that could not fail to entertain the audience.

**Chris Bull** - (YOUNG PRINCE)

**Jodi Roberts** - (ENCHANTRESS) - These two opened the show, setting the story for what was to follow by mime with the 'Young Prince' rejecting the approach by the 'Enchantress' and her placing a curse on the him and turning him into 'The Beast'. This mime was well presented.

**Dan Wainman** - (THE BEAST / PRINCE) - This is a difficult role to play but Dan did it full justice. As the 'Beast' you lose the chance of using facial expressions and have to rely on body language and your vocal ability to portray the various emotions and this you did extremely well. The anger displayed on the position you find yourself in to your eventual love for 'Belle' was well displayed. Your singing voice was well controlled and in particular the number in the first act finale "*If I Can't Love Her*" brought out all the emotion of a tormented soul. - Congratulations.

**Kerry Ayers** - (BELLE) - This young lady was excellent. Her initial abhorrence towards the 'Beast' to her eventual love for him, was beautifully portrayed. Kerry has an impressive acting ability which came to the fore in this production, running through the whole gamut of emotions in both her dealings with 'The Beast' and her Father, 'Maurice'. Kerry also came across very well vocally in her various numbers, her singing being precise and well controlled - Well done.

**Jeremy Turner** - (LEFOU) - This is a Director's nightmare, when one of your principals is incapacitated and you have to step in at the last minute, as I know to my cost, having experienced it myself. But Andrew rose to the occasion and gave a terrific performance as the side-kick of 'Gaston' who subjected him to numerous assaults, all of which looked most effective all combined with a series of hilarious facial expressions - Well done.

**Richard Talbot** - (GASTON) - Richard made the most of this part presenting a character who was full of his own importance and who thought all the ladies loved him. But he was not particularly well liked and eventually came unstuck in his various manoeuvres to get 'Belle' to marry him! His bragging could not have been bettered and his 'rapport' with 'Lefou' was well brought out. Richard also presented a fine singing voice of power and control - Well done.

**David Hornsby** - (MAURICE) - As the inventor father of 'Belle', David developed a good character. This seasoned performer gave him a life of his own displaying all the eccentricity called for in the part. His feelings towards his daughter 'Belle' was beautifully portrayed as was his singing duet with his daughter "*No Matter What*" together with the Reprise - loved your invention which made quite an impact on your entrance and which you manipulated well within the confines of the stage.

**Philip Fine** - (COGSWORTH) - A walking, talking, singing clock, where else would you see such a character outside of a Disney musical!!! Philip's costume of a clock with working pendulum was something else and I would imagine it was constricting in your movements etc; but Philip developed an excellent character. His singing voice blended in very well with the concerted numbers he was involved with.

**Bruce Walton** - (LUMIERE) - This was another Disney-ish character attired in an outstanding costume and make-up with two working flame effect torches held in each hand in a candelabra mode. Although tiring, I would have liked to have seen you hold the candelabra pose more often with more use made of the torches to emphasise parts of your libretto, but this is a minor criticism. Here we were presented with an excellent voice characterisation, sustained throughout with good diction and projection - Another excellent characterisation.

**Alison Hallford** - (BABETTE) - What a lovely, flirtatious 'French Maid' Alison made of her. Her movements could not have been bettered with a well maintained French accent throughout the performance, all aided by a first class costume. Her flirting with 'Lumiere' was something else - Well done.

**Janet Bishop** - (Mrs POTTS)

**Elysia Roadnight** - (CHIP) - To move around the stage dressed as a teapot with one arm permanently extended as a teapot spout and at the same time wheel a tea trolley with one hand must have been difficult in the extreme, but you carried it off very well. This was a lovely characterisation, dispensing tea to all and sundry with a well sung "*Beauty and the Beast*". The role of 'Chip' was played by Elysia on the

night of my visit and how well it was played. To be pushed around on a tea trolley with just your head showing and encased in a teacup must have been very difficult but you spoke up well with clear diction and projection. Although I didn't see the other 'Chip' played by Zara, I am sure she was as good - Well done

**Anne Sloan** - (MADAME DE LA GRANDE BOUCHE) - This was a great portrayal by Anne dressed as a wardrobe which must have restricted your movements considerably, but you made your movements look easy. This costume was another one from the Disney stable with opening drawers containing dresses. You also presented a superb operatic voice which certainly came to the fore in the concerted numbers - Well done.

**Gareth Williams** - (MONSIEUR D'ARQUE) - As the villain of the piece, Gareth emanated an air of menace whenever he appeared. His costume together with his body language certainly emphasised his evilness and left the audience in no doubt of his intentions. Although only a small role in the overall production, it had impact.

**Melanie Austin** )

**Joanne Firth** )

**Sarah Kennedy** )

**Emily Sloan** )

**Louisa Talbot** ) - (SILLY GIRLS) - These five attractive young ladies portrayed their 'Silly Girl' characters spot-on and maintained them throughout the performance. They flitted about the stage as if joined together while endeavouring to 'capture' 'Gaston'. Good all-round portrayals by you all.

**Jonathan Rubery** - (BOOKSELLER) - This minor role was well presented by Jonathan, although only a minor role, it had the necessary impact.

**Chorus of Townsfolk & Servants** - The eighteen chorus members entered fully into this production, they sang well with a good balance of voices. Movement about the stage was well controlled and the choreographic routines were well danced, being precise and in time and which came to the fore in the scene with all the items of cutlery etc: - Well done to all of you.

**Andrew Wilson-Jenner** - (DIRECTOR & CHOREOGRAPHER) - I have already praised Andrew for stepping in for 'Lefou' and now I have to congratulate him again for his direction and choreographic routines. *'Beauty and the Beast'* had been well cast with all the correct characterisations being brought out. Staging within the confines of the Wykham Theatre stage had been well contrived so that it did not appear congested at any time. Movement for both principals and chorus ensured a balanced stage at all times which resulted in some attractive pictures being presented - An excellent production - Congratulations.

**Philip Shaw OBE FRSA** - (MUSICAL DIRECTOR) - Musically this show was well

served by Philip. It was obvious that both principals and chorus had been well rehearsed in the music with impressive singing with well balanced voices in the concerted numbers. The show was also well served by eleven excellent musicians in the orchestra with a good balance of instruments and who played sympathetically for the cast, no easy task having no orchestra pit.

**Alison Halford** - (DANCE CAPTAIN & speciality choreographer) - As Dance Captain, Alison ensured that Andrew's routines were well rehearsed and her speciality choreography had the necessary impact. All members appeared well rehearsed in the various routines which presented colour and precise movement on stage - Well done.

**Stage Manager & Crew** - Take a bow, you deserve it. Your manipulation of the set of scenery was well worked and all your hard work paid off with swift silent scene changes which added much to the flow of the production, eliminating those terrible 'pregnant pauses'. Overall this was a well managed stage.

**Set Design, Construction & Painting** - A good set design which interpreted the 13 scenes, covering 'The Town', 'The Castle', 'The Tavern' and 'The Forest'

**Costumes** - This was a wonderful set of costumes which certainly upheld the Disney myth. They were colourful as well as being outrageous. To see such an array, featuring walking clocks, wardrobes and teapots together with a selection of plates and cutlery was amazing. One small point, the front panel on 'Cogsworth's' costume reflected the light from the stage lights into the audiences eyes and needed to have the shine taken off it.

**Lighting** - The lighting design and operation was impressive and ensured the right atmosphere was generated on stage for all 13 scenes. I did not notice a late cue all evening.

**Sound** - The sound plot was good with well picked up cues. I did feel however that some manipulation of 'Belle's' was required as at times her top notes did appear a little on the shrill side which I felt was caused by the sound system.

**Props** - A fine selection of props. 'Maurice's' invention was brilliantly constructed, and the fact that it moved under its own power was an added bonus, and the illuminated mirror had the right impact. The remainder of the props were pertinent to the plot and looked authentic. I did feel however that the front of the tea trolley appeared to have a sheet of aluminium which badly reflected the stage light and was somewhat distracting to the audience.

**Make-up, Hair and Wigs** - The make-up had been well applied and the various characters well brought out. I was particularly impressed with the 'Beast's' make-up, which was quite dramatic. Hair had been well styled for the period and the wigs appeared to fit well and had been well dressed

**Pyrotechnics** - This was the first time I have reviewed '*Beauty and the Beast*' where pyrotechnics have been used and I congratulate the society for taking onboard the high expenditure for this type of presentation - But what a difference it made and was well worth the extra cost.

**Flying** - Again, this was the first time I have seen a flying sequence used in '*Beauty and the Beast*' which was well controlled and would have had a much bigger impact if the silver coloured wires had been blackened as the lights shining off them spoilt the illusion.

**Programme** - A good programme which contained a wealth of information. It had been well laid out with well reproduced photographs. It had been printed on good quality paper with an attractive and eye-catching cover. I would suggest you enter this Programme in the NODA Programme competition.

**Front of House** - Excellent Front of House staff, all smartly dressed and attentive to their audience. They were all easily identifiable and it was good to see NODA Long Service Medals being worn.

Thank you for inviting me to review your latest production '*Beauty and the Beast*' and for your excellent hospitality. Since its release this is the fourth '*Beauty*' I have reviewed and I think it fair to say it was probably the best. A most enjoyable evenings entertainment. May I take this opportunity to wish you all success with you future productions.

**Henry**

**NODA Representative - London Region - Area 13.**