



Past Reviews

Regional Reviews: Phoenix

Disney's Beauty and the Beast

Arizona Broadway Theatre

Review by [Gil Benbrook](#) | [Season Schedule](#)

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Disney's Beauty and the Beast ran for over 13 years on Broadway, so to say it was a blockbuster show is pretty much an understatement. Based on the beloved animated film, which received an Oscar nomination for Best Picture, the 1994 Broadway musical featured songs from the film by composer Alan Menken and Howard Ashman, a book by screenwriter Linda Woolverton, and new songs by Menken with lyrics by Tim Rice. Along with a skilled design team, they were able to fully create the imaginary world of the film on stage, including colorful and creative costumes that brought the film characters to life.

Arizona Broadway Theatre's production may not have creative elements as elaborate as what was seen on Broadway, but with a talented cast, several large set pieces, excellent costumes, and direction that is never heavy handed, it is a solid production of this family friendly show. It also successfully delivers on stage the important message of the film—that beauty is really found from within.



Tony Edgerton and Jill-Christine Wiley

Photo Courtesy of Arizona Broadway Theatre

I have to imagine just about everyone knows the plot, but in case you don't, or need a reminder: Once upon a time on a stormy night, a vain and arrogant Prince turns away a hideous beggar woman who comes to his door seeking shelter. When she reveals herself as an Enchantress, she casts a spell on him and everyone else in his castle. The Prince becomes a monstrous beast and his servants are turned into inanimate objects. The spell will

...s. The Prince becomes a monstrous beast and the servants are turned into inanimate objects. The spell can only be broken if the Beast can learn to love another and earn her love in return. Many years later, in a nearby village, the beautiful, smart but bookish Belle dreams of escaping her small provincial town and the simple-minded people who live there, especially the boastful and boorish Gaston, who has vowed to marry Belle. Her father finds himself lost in the woods one day, stumbles upon the Beast's castle, and is imprisoned by him. Belle sacrifices herself to free her father and in time finds that the Beast may not be as horrible as he seems. But can their growing love break the spell the Enchantress cast?

Jill-Christine Wiley makes for a vibrant Belle. She instills the character with a keen sense of determination, but she also paints Belle as sweet, spunky, smart, and full of life. Wiley has a beautiful singing voice filled with purity and clarity that delivers some superb versions of the film's familiar tunes as well as a touching take on "A Change in Me," one of the songs written for the stage production. As the Beast, Tony Edgerton has the part that changes the most and he does exceptionally well in showing how this petulant man-child grows from a snarling animal into a person who actually has genuine feelings for the people around him. Edgerton adds sweet elements of humor and a bit of a swagger to the Beast's demeanor as he realizes Belle might actually be falling for him, though there are also elements of fear, shyness and nervousness that he instills. I especially like how the Beast holds onto his tail as a security blanket when he's anxious or afraid. The changes in the Beast and his growing confidence come through very clearly even though Edgerton is buried under a fairly elaborate Beast mask and wig. Like Wiley, his voice soars to the rafters on the few songs he has, with his "If I Can't Love Her" especially moving.

In the supporting cast, Ben Stasny and Zachary Spiegel make a hilarious twosome as the witty, rambunctious, fun, and slightly lusty candlestick Lumière and the tightly wound, worrisome, and overly dramatic clock Cogsworth. T.J Nelson and Christopher Michaels are equally as good as Gaston and his comical sidekick Lefou. Nelson's strong voice and lean muscular frame work perfectly for this conceited, burly man, while Michaels doesn't overplay Lefou too broadly, which is a huge plus. Gerri Weagraff's Mrs. Potts is sensible and full of charm—her performance of the title tune is a winner—and Jon Gentry is sweet and loving as Belle's father. The incredibly hard-working ensemble skillfully play an abundance of roles.

Director Clayton Phillips does good work, not letting his cast stray too far from the well-known and iconic film characterizations but also adding some nice original touches that play up the comedy and fantasy elements of the show. Choreographer Kurtis W. Overby's dances provide several showstopping moments and music director Adam Berger achieves an incredibly lush and full sound from both the fairly large cast and the seven-piece orchestra. While the costumes are all rentals, and quite good ones, Paul A. Black's scenic elements and lighting designs are highly effective, with a beautiful painted show curtain that evokes a deep, dark and mysterious forest and five large set pieces, including three that move and rotate, portraying the various rooms in the Beast's castle. The only slight drawback in the overall design and direction has to do with the (spoiler alert) transformation at the end of the show which could be focused a little better, with more subdued lighting and tighter direction, to hide some of the stage effects used to create the magical illusion.

Disney's Beauty and the Beast is one of the most loved of the Disney animated films and the stage version is a faithful adaptation that delivers many magical and heartwarming moments. ABT's production is full of humor and heart with fantasy-filled creative elements and a lovely cast and firm direction that make the whole production feel fresh and relevant today.

Disney's Beauty and the Beast runs through July 2nd, 2017, at Arizona Broadway Theatre, 7701 West Paradise Lane in Peoria. It also plays at the Herberger Theater Center in downtown Phoenix from July 7th to the 16th, 2017. Tickets can be ordered at www.azbroadway.org or by calling 623 776-8400.

Music by Alan Menken
Lyrics by Howard Ashman and Tim Rice
Book by Linda Wolverton
Stage Direction by Clayton Phillips
Choreography: Kurtis W. Overby
Music Direction: Adam Berger

Set & Lighting Design: Paul A. Black
Costumes provided by Costumes World Theatrical
Wig/Makeup Design: Amanda Gran
Sound Design: Connor Adams
Executive Producer: Kiel Klaphake
Casting and Artistic Producer: Cassandra Klaphake

Cast:

Chip: Corban Adams
Ensemble: Marty Craft
Ensemble/Belle Cover: Trisha Hart Ditsworth
Beast: Tony Edgerton*
Enchantress/Silly Girl/Ensemble: Hannah Fairman
oice: Jon Gentry
Ensemble: Cody Hernandez
Babette: Melissa Jones
Silly Girl/Ensemble/Wardrobe Cover: Renée Kathleen Koher
Ensemble/Gaston Cover: Nick Kuhn
Carpet/Ensemble: Bradlee Laight
Monsieur D'arque/Ensemble: Eddie Maldonado
Ensemble: Jennifer Maurer
Lefou: Christopher Michaels
Silly Girl/Ensemble: Lauren Morgan
Ensemble: Conner Morley
Gaston: Tj Nelson
Ensemble/Silly Girl Swing: Lauren Paley
Chip: Corrine Seaver
Cogsworth: Zachary Spiegel
Lumière: Ben Stasny
Madame De La Grand Bouche/Mrs. Potts Cover: Eleonore S. Thomas
Mrs. Potts: Gerri Weagraff
Belle: Jill-Christine Wiley

*Member, Actors' Equity Association

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