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CHELTENHAM OPERATIC AND DRAMATIC SOCIETY

**Beauty and The Beast**

**Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham**

**May 29<sup>th</sup> 2013**

***Director: Jonathan Dyer***

***MD: Allan Gillespie***

***Choreographer: Sara Harwood***

I welcomed the opportunity to see this show again; especially as everyone I had spoken to was very enthusiastic about it. I was not disappointed, although I did have some concerns at the beginning during the Prologue, as I lost some of the story, as the speech was indistinct, I do not know if it was the use of the microphone distorting the voice, or if it had been recorded and the reproduction was poor. I have seen several different interpretations of the Prologue; this one had the Prince and the Enchantress miming the story behind a gauze. The opening number was excellent; it was confidently sung and full of energy, which set the standard for the rest of the show. It was an interesting set from Scenic Projects, which worked very well. There are many scene changes in this show, all of which are important to the story, the audience know the film so well, and they have certain expectations. The forest backcloth, helped by good lighting made these scenes quite scary. I liked the flexibility of the scenery for the interior of the Castle. Mostly the lighting was well cued and helped create the correct atmosphere throughout, whether it was the sunny morning in the town, with all the bustle of a market day, the gloom of the castle, or the sinister meeting with Monsieur d'Arque. The use of shadows in 'Kill the Beast' helped to increase the feeling of a large unruly 'mob'. Also the use of smoke was well controlled and added to the atmosphere when used. The costumes for this show are very difficult both to construct and wear, with all the knives, forks, spoons, plates, pepper and salt pots and so on; not forgetting the clock, feather duster, wardrobe, teapot, large cup and saucer and candelabra. They were all well fitting and certainly helped to take the audience into the fantasy world of Disney. There must have been some swift changes in 'Be Our Guest'. The costume for the Beast enabled him to move, speak and sing properly, it worked well. Again the wolf costumes allowed maximum movement in the fights with Maurice and The Beast. Fight coordinator Stephen Bennett had created believable action. Choreographer Sara Harwood had devised some excellent routines, which were confidently executed by the cast. Each number had been individually tailored, bringing energy and romance where they were required. 'Be Our Guest' was lively, with a large variety of dance styles, creating a party atmosphere. The show had been well cast and everyone had worked hard to bring well-rounded characters to the production. Lumiere, Cogsworth, Mme de la Grand Bouche and Babette brought much humour

to the show, with their characterisation and timing. Chip gave us the important facial expressions required of this role, as most of the time you only see his face. Mrs Potts was the matriarch of the group, looking after everyone, and giving a lovely rendition of 'Beauty and the Beast', one of the best songs in the show. Gaston and Lefou worked well together, Lefou handling his rough treatment stoically. The cameo role of Monsieur d'Arque was spine-chillingly evil. Maurice was convincing as the eccentric inventor and caring, though absent-minded father. Hannah Bennett as Belle, put her own stamp on the character, bringing her to life, she showed her independent spirit in her dealings with Gaston, and initially with The Beast, her concern for her father, and her gradual change of heart for The Beast, a lovely performance. The Beast is a complex role he has to show the frustration and anger of the situation he has brought about by his earlier behaviour towards the old woman, who turns out to be an enchantress; then the gradual softening towards Belle, and lastly the change from Beast back to Prince. Greg Aston showed all these facets of the character, including a subtle softening towards Belle, with slightly more human movements during 'Beauty and the Beast' and then reverting back when Belle left to help her father. He was confident in his characterisation, consistent in his movements, and princely after the spell had been broken. There was a high standard of singing from the whole company, with good, clear diction so that every word was heard; and all the songs were interpreted sympathetically. MD Allan Gillespie was firmly in control of his orchestra, who all played well. The sound from orchestra and voices was well balanced, and we did not lose any dialogue in the underscored sections. The Junior Ensemble was all enthusiastic and well disciplined, giving an added dimension to the production. Director Jonathan Dyer had obviously put much thought and hard work into directing and inspiring his cast to produce a show, which in his words "would be true to the Disney original whilst giving audiences a spectacular Broadway musical", it certainly did. Shows like this do not just happen, there are many hours of hard work in each area, with everyone working as a team, for it to be successful. Well done everyone.

Frankie Telford.  
Regional Representative. District 15.

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