

NODA Review

Beauty and the Beast Jr

Viva Youth

This 'Tale as Old as Time' was a good choice for the very talented youngest members of Viva. The Performing Arts Centre at Soham Village College is not the usual Viva venue and it is much larger space than they are used to. However there was a good atmosphere in the auditorium as the audience took their seats.

Technically this was a pretty fast moving production that placed great demands on the cast, so how did they rise to the challenge?

From the beginning the vitality and exuberance of the cast was evident, everyone giving their all in whatever role they were playing. The costumes of the principal players, in particular the servants in the Beast's castle were first-rate. The scenery was minimal with just a wall and a covered archway for the castle with a superb backcloth used for the village. What props there were were good and some neat ideas used to depict various settings such as the library. The lovely glass case with the dying rose did not work for me as it really needed its own spot light. Having said that there were some very nice lighting effects. The backing music was overly loud during the first act but this was rectified at the interval. There were one or two audibility problems particularly the positioning of the standing mics for the Narrators. Maybe after opening night they were slightly lowered or the Narrators repositioned as many of their lines were lost. The choreography (by LOUISE PLUMMER) was well thought out and suited all abilities which showed in the execution. The big numbers were full of life. Musical Director JENNY TAYLER-SURRIDGE had obviously worked hard with the cast on the vocals and they all did extremely well.

The four Narrators: EDWARD REES, JACK GASH, KATIE KIRKPATRICK and SUMMER DOWNLING related the prologue and kept the story on track.

HOLLY PRYKE established the strong and loving character of Belle. She 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 singing and acting skills were a delight. JAVIER LONDONO played her eccentric father Maurice with a nice touch of humour.

ZACK WYMER in the role of the arrogant Gaston who didn't get his girl was domineering and totally arrogant. This was a good confident performance. He and Lefou, bounced off each other well. I particularly enjoyed ZAK POTTS assured performance as Lefou. He acquitted himself well allowing Gaston to always shine whilst he appeared a bit of a fool and handling his rough treatment stoically. This pair worked well together. The song in the tavern was particularly good.

The aptly named 'Silly Girls', ABBY CORNWELL, LOLA MACDONALD and SIENNA WARDER worked together well and added comedy.

Showing good individual characterisation were the servants.

MARK O'REILLY'S humorous Lumiere was great - a role he clearly enjoyed doing and one which he did extremely well. The role of the slightly nervous Cogsworth was played by CALLUM MOFFAT and was well done. Both brought much humour to the show, with their characterisations. PHYLLIDA HICKISH as the comforting Mrs Potts was also very good she has a nice voice which was well used in a lovely rendition of 'Beauty and the Beast', one of the best songs in the show.

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DRESDEN GOODWIN, as opera singer turned Wardrobe Madame de la Grand Bouche was very good and has a lovely voice. KIERA O'REILLY, as a saucy Babette, added to the fun. As Chip, RUBY MACDONALD gave us the important facial expressions required of this role, as most of the time you only see Chip's face and she spoke clearly and confidently. Completing the line-up in the Castle was TORIN FAHY as the Beast, who did well in the title role.

Musically I very much enjoyed *The Tavern*, but the most spectacular was *Be Our Guest* with everyone dressed as knives, forks, menus etc, all coming to life and dancing a smashing routine.

Directors BEN CLARK and LEE 'GLEE' SHERWOOD were once young Viva members themselves and they are now passing on their skill and experience to the next group of young performers who did them full justice.

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. This was a lovely production that received a great reception from the first night audience. Congratulations to the Directors, the production team and all involved.

Julie Petrucci

Regional Representative, NODA East District Four South