

# MTL's 'Beauty and the Beast' holds both old and young spellbound

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The Evening News

If you haven't been to Music Theatre Louisville recently, you're missing out on one of the greatest assets in the community. The \$9.2 million renovation, completed in 2003, has created an amazing stage on which some incredible performances are possible. The Iroquois Park Amphitheatre is a tremendous playhouse now in its 25th season.

It's one thing to put on a suit and tie and pack yourself into one of the slightly-under-sized seats at the Kentucky Center

for the Arts, but it's a totally different experience to show up in shorts and grab a waffle cone while you watch the show in an open air theatre. You can get seats under roof or under the stars. It's your choice.

Beauty and the Beast runs through June 26 and it's a performance you don't want to miss! The show opened Friday night to a crowd estimated at 1,400 and drew a standing ovation — a well-deserved one, I might add.

It was somewhat of an old home night for me as I discovered the show's music director is Craig Swatt who once directed the church choir at St. Anthony's in Clarksville before moving on to a full-time theatrical career. As if that wasn't enough, the production's costume director is Guy Tedesco who is as well known in Clark and Floyd counties for his art works as

for his costumes. Suffice it to say the music was tremendous and the costumes were both creative and gorgeous. Kudos to both!

The production is a joint venture involving New Albany High School, Music Theatre Louisville and the Las Vegas Academy operated by former Floyd Central High School theatrical director

## Beauty and the Beast

Now showing at the Iroquois Amphitheatre through June 26.

Tickets are \$16-\$21, available at the Amphitheatre box office or through TicketMaster at (502) 361-3100 or [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com).

Glen Edwards. Sharing the costs made it possible to bring a production of this magnitude to the MTL stage.

Beauty and the Beast is the fairy tale about a prince who is changed into a beast by an enchantress and who must

win the love of a woman before he is returned to human form. His challenge is to do so before the petals of an enchanted rose fall from the flower.

Not only is the prince changed by the spell, but the entire court of his castle is gradually turning into household objects.

Through a convoluted series of events, he meets Belle, the daughter of an eccentric inventor when she agrees to take the place of her father who has been locked in a dungeon by the beast for trespassing into the castle. Belle begins to see the loving side of the beast, who also begins to learn how to love.

Belle is freed when the beast sees how she longs for her father and she returns home. But the stunningly handsome Gaston, a playboy from Belle's village, desires her hand in marriage and will

stop at nothing to get what he wants. He sets out on a mission to kill the beast when he learns of Belle's affections and ... well you can see how it ends at next week's performances.

While the entire cast is great, there were some incredible performances worthy of note. Top on the list is the show's heroine, Belle, played by 15-year-old Marissa Ghavami. Her acting is incredible, and her voice captivating. She has performed in more than 25 productions at theatres including Derby Dinner Playhouse, Bellarmine University and Indiana University Southeast. She has studied for eight years at the Walden Theatre and has sung at the Apollo Theatre in New York City. Keep an eye on this girl, she's going places!

Ross Lekites, who plays the Beast, also gave a great performance. He is the 2004 Coca-Cola Talent Contest winner and has been in performances at MTL including Peter Pan and Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. It's difficult to convey emotion from beneath a full-head costume, but Lekites pulls it off beautifully.

I was also impressed with performances by Gregory Maupin as Lumiere, one of the courtiers who is turning into a candle stick; Jay Nelson as Cogsworth, the head of staff who is becoming a clock; Tracey Zadavil, who plays Mrs. Potts the cook who is becoming a tea pot. Zadavil has an incredible voice and thrills with her reprise of the play's main theme.

Other cast members worthy of special notice are Connor Holloway who plays Mrs. Potts' son Chip who is turning into a chipped tea cup; Gordon Crawford, who plays the stunningly handsome Gaston; Matt Orme, who plays



Marissa Ghavami and Ross Lekites play the title characters in 'Beauty and the Beast,' now showing at the Iroquois Park Amphitheatre through June 26.

STAFF PHOTO BY JOHN GILKEY

Maurice, Belle's father, and Andrea Scheu, who plays Babette, the maid who is turning into a feather duster. In all honesty, you could go down the list of all cast members as deserving special note. There wasn't a weak casting decision made in the entire ensemble.

The stage sets, provided by ABC Productions, the licensing company, were tremendous. It's a shame that budget cuts in the amphitheatre's renovation eliminated a portion of the mechanism needed to fly some of the scenes on

and off stage. But Performance Supervisor Leslie Oberhausen, Production Manager Daniel Mangan, Stage Manager Pamela Mattei and Scenic Designer Lee Buckholtz managed to get around those obstacles with a set budget of only \$200, so I'm told. Impressive!

Director Mirla Criste did a wonderful job of coordinating the production. And why not, she says it was her favorite fairy tale as a child. I mentioned Music director Craig Swatt earlier, but it's worth mentioning again how he

managed the orchestra of 17 and presented a performance you would have sworn was performed by a group twice that size. The music is beautiful to begin with, and when performed as it was Friday evening it is truly captivating.

Be sure and catch a performance of this production which is a part of the PNC Bank Broadway in Louisville series. If you have kids, you can treat them to "Tea with Belle" June 22 or 24 from 6:45 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Call 589-4060 for more details.