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PERFORMING ARTS

Disney's 'Beauty and the Beast'

Starring Marissa Ghavami, Ross Lekites, Gregory Maupin, Jay Nelson, Andrea Scheu, Gordon L. Crawford and Kevin Thacker. Directed by Mirla Criste. A Music Theatre of Louisville production. Continues at the Iroquois Park Amphitheater through June 26. For tickets or more info, call 589-4060 or visit www.musictheatreloouisville.com.

Gordon Crawford
as Gaston and
Marissa
Ghavami as
Belle.

JONATHAN BROWN

Disney's 'Beauty and the Beast'

Music Theatre Louisville's production of Disney's "Beauty and the Beast," is nearly as fascinating as the enchanted castle that Belle discovers in the French fairy tale. For three hours, the MTL cast, director Mirla Criste and musical director Craig Swatt deliver a production that — save for some innocent flirting between a candelabra and a feather duster — is high-quality family entertainment.

theater

The musical, currently running at the Iroquois Park Amphitheater, is the Broadway version of the Disney movie, and the vocal talent of 15-year-old Marissa Ghavami, as Belle, and 20-year-old Ross Lekites, as the Beast, is about as close as you can get to Broadway-caliber ability without catching the show in New York City. The pair delivered outstanding performances on opening night. The acting, however,

lacks at key emotional moments. For example, the scene where Beast saves Belle from a pack of wolves felt hokey — possibly because the actors, who were wolves, stayed on all fours instead of lunging at the Beast. But it's unlikely children will mind. And despite the show's length, the two dozen children around me followed the musical word for word.

Why wouldn't they? The cast of familiar characters is live and in front of them. There's Belle, the beautiful, book-smart heroine; the Beast, a prince turned into a monster by a witch; and Gaston (Gordon L. Crawford), the hulky, smarmy hunter who wants to marry Belle. When the witch cast her spell on the Beast for being overly selfish, she included everything and everyone in his castle. So there's also Mrs. Potts (Tracey Zavadil), the maid who became a teapot; her son Chip (Connor Holloway), who became a cracked teacup; Lumiere (Gregory Maupin), a gracious candelabra; and Cogsworth (Jay Nelson), an anxious and fretful clock.

Familiar songs such as "Be Our Guest" and "Beauty and the Beast" are also present, and it's during these ensemble pieces that the cast truly shines. Reminiscent of the movie,

"Be Our Guest" involves dancing and singing from enchanted pieces of porcelain, flatware and cutlery. For this number, costume designer Guy Tedesco offers up show girls with large, spinning plates on their backs and sequined teacups on their heads, a twirling silver corkscrew and red, blue and yellow magic carpets that tumble across the stage.

All of Tedesco's costumes, apart from a bland design of white porcelain and pale yellow flowers for Mrs. Potts, are well designed. One superb example is the "fire" of Lumiere's candles. Maupin controls blowers, lights and smoke to make the ends of his hands (covered in large candlesticks) light up at will.

In short, there is not enough space here to list all of the touches that made this production memorable. From the crooked two-story provincial houses in the opening number to the high-wire ropes used during the Beast's transformation back into a human to Criste's multidimensional direction to the live orchestra, it all adds up to a production that is easy to recommend.

BY DANA NORTON
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