

## **Beauty and the Beast – Disney Theatrical Productions**

After its film premiere in 1991, 'Beauty And The Beast' had its staged musical premiere in 1994 where it went on to be one of the longest running stage productions on West End. This production brings back many of the original creatives from the 1994 production including composer, lyricist, book writer, set and lighting designers to create this masterpiece.

The sets looked exactly like in the film; you could feel the nostalgia flooding through the theatre as audiences were whisked away into Belle's world. Multiple sheer screens were used to facilitate the magical illusions and immersive visuals, as lights and shadows were projected across and through them. The multiple layers made it feel so three-dimensional, particularly in the scene in the woods where Maurice is silhouetted on his journey home when he gets mobbed by wolves.

**Shubshri Kandiah** delightfully portrayed Belle, bringing a youthful energy and sparkling vocal tone to the character. In the role of Beast, was **Brendan Xavier**. In his spoken text, Beast felt unsettled and rushed, however this was not the case when singing. Xavier had a stunning, rich tone which flooded the auditorium, particularly in his aria reprise. His characterisation showed an interesting interpretation with the beast being more bitchy than terrifying, and also getting many laughs.

**Jackson Head** was brilliantly grotesque, playing the misogynist caricature of Gaston. As his trusty side kick Le Fou, **Nick Cox** excelled; his physical comedy and timing was perfectly executed to heighten Gaston's scenes. At times, some of the human characterisations felt like perfectly manufactured replicas of the cartoon itself, which left me yearning for more authenticity. And funnily enough, it was from the enchanted objects that we got it.

**Rohan Browne** shone in the role of Lumiere; his comedic performance lit up the theatre highlighting his superb stagecraft. **Gareth Jacobs** played the tightly-wound yet ostentatious Cogsworth, giving a very entertaining and heartfelt performance. **Jayde Westaby** warmed our hearts as Mrs Potts, her performance of 'Beauty And The Beast' was beautifully grounded. The trio had strong chemistry and injected the script's personality into their characters, making them immediately lovable and particularly enjoyable to watch. **Hayley Martin** and **Alana Tranter** were highly entertaining as Babette and Madame, perfectly rounding out the cast of objects with **Orlando Steiner** charming the audience as the adorable Chip.

The chorus ensemble stole the show. Their commitment to the many characters they played was exceptional, but most of all it was their flawless uniformity that took my breath away.

There are two extended chorus numbers that have been written into this production, which gave this incredible ensemble more chance to shine. Using Busby Berkeley-style choreography, the chorus danced in complex geometric patterns using large feathers and other props. As I looked around the room, everyone had the biggest, childlike grins on their faces – it was hard to believe the magic happening in front of our eyes. Just when I thought it couldn't boggle my mind any further, a live projection from directly above the stage filled

the backdrop, showing us an aerial view of the kaleidoscopic patterns the performers were making. I've never seen so many people jump up, without hesitation, to give a standing ovation right in the middle of the show.

There are moments to iron out; some clunky scene changes and times when the orchestra and leads took a while to gel, however this spellbinding production is not to be missed. When I read that it took a 77 person-strong crew and 23 trucks to move the 80 tonnes of scenery and automation, 300 costumes and 119 wigs, I knew it was going to be a spectacular and immersive masterpiece, and this production of 'Beauty And The Beast' is precisely that.

★★★★☆

[Review: Disney's Beauty And The Beast @ Capitol Theatre \(Sydney\) \(scenestr.com.au\)](https://scenestr.com.au/review/disneys-beauty-and-the-beast-capitol-theatre-sydney)