

**Beauty And The Beast - Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the  
Civic Theatre (23<sup>rd</sup> September)**

Review by Cheryl Rogers

I could hardly wait to write this review this morning! In this, their 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, C.A.O.D.S delivered a spectacular show, without doubt the most ambitious production they have ever performed.

'Be our guest' the man sang – what an invitation to the party! This 'Beauty and the Beast' was pure Disney, so true to the original film, that the audience was captured from the very first scene.

In this review I don't want to leave anything out, so many aspects of this production deserve a mention. Let me start with the principal characters - the dream cast! Gareth Barton, as the beast, was amazing. His voice and appearance was so like the Disney beast and his ability to sustain this through the whole show and to convey so many emotions, even through a massive costume and mask, was astounding. Sarah Barton, as Belle, was the very epitome of a Disney heroine. Her movements made me laugh with pleasure at how well she captured this style, Sarah never disappoints, she is always fabulous and as always, her voice was superb. A huge favourite was Richard Harrison, who played her suitor, Gaston. What an inspired piece of casting! Obviously born to play the role, he is very tall with a great physique, charm in abundance and a lovely voice. With a fine line in vanity, he was a joy to watch. His long suffering servant, Lefou, played by Jimmy Hooper, is another good comedy actor. No fake falls for him – when he was flung across the stage by Gaston it was for real, he is brilliant at slap stick. Then we had all the characters living in the enchanted castle, bewitched and turned into household objects. These costumes were fantastic! Every one of them deserves to be saluted for coping with the enormous constructions they wore. Ben Martins as Lumiere (the candlestick) made the most of every movement, innuendo and cheeky dialogue. His gift for comedy was used to great effect and he delivered 'Be Our Guest', the spectacular chorus number, with real style. Kevin Abrey, as Cogsworth (the clock) was another fabulous character – nobody does 'pompous' as well as Kevin! They just kept coming... Diana Baker, lovely as Mrs Potts (the teapot), also made for this part. The icing on the cake (forgive the pun) was her fairytale rendition of the title song 'Beauty and the Beast'.

There are so many other actors to mention. The effervescent Rachel Brown, the hilarious Elle Moreton, evil John Sullivan – who also was responsible for creating many of the brilliant stage effects, dotty dad Trevor Lowman and of course, who could not be delighted by young Chip, played adorably by five year old Noah Miller in this performance. Not a single weak performance from these and every other cameo role, plus a fine, vibrant chorus who brought alive the big scenes. All this, plus an excellent band under the leadership of Patrick Tucker, slick scene changes and breathtaking costumes. What a show!

Finally, an accolade to the director, Ray Jeffery, who brought this story to life and set a standard so high that it's close to professional. Thank you for a magical evening C.A.O.D.S. Here's to the next 90 years!

Photo by Christopher Yorke-Edwards