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Gregory G. H. Rihn ([@milwaukeeesfs](#)) wrote,
@ [2009-07-10](#) 16:11:00



Beauty and the Beast

Tonight at 7:30 the curtain goes up on the West Allis Players/Village Playhouse of Wauwatosa joint production of "Disney's Beauty and the Beast," the stage musical adapted from the 1991 animated film. Having not been in musicals since "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," I thought I'd try out, since I love the movie (nominated for "Best Picture" before they had a separate category for animation) and Belle is my all-time favorite Disney heroine. I didn't realize how much the musical had changed from the film, or I would have done my audition strategy differently. I recalled (correctly) that Belle's father, Maurice, doesn't have any songs in the movie. On the other hand, I recalled incorrectly that Cogsworth probably had to dance in the "Be Our Guest" number. This affects my audition strategy, since acting is my strongest suit, but I am a poor dancer. As for singing, I can carry a tune and sing expressively, but my voice just isn't strong enough to be a lead. So, although I was in the running for Maurice, the part went to Rick Anderson, whom I've worked with before and who is a swell guy, a good actor and a better singer than I am. Had I known Cogsworth didn't have to dance and only has a short solo in the "Human Again" number, I would have taken a shot at that role. Oh, well.

As it is, I am the Bookseller, which is essentially a chorus role with a few lines. However, I also get to do the voice-over narration that opens the show, so that's nice. Director James Lentz, Jr. had the idea to make the Bookseller a bit of a contrarian with respect to the rest of the villagers who slavishly follow Gaston, so I am doing some subtle bits in some of the group numbers to indicate I'm not going along with the crowd. There's a bit more, but you'll have to come see it--.

I think the show's going to be really good. James (whom I acted with in "Rehearsal for Murder,"), our choreographer Amie Ferrante, music director Megan Sweeny and the rest of the production crew have really done an enormous job of organizing a cast of ninety, including many children, and getting this show on the road in five and a half weeks. Although we are performing at the usual West Allis venue, West Allis Central High School, the group from the Village Playhouse of Wauwatosa have provided invaluable support, particularly in the area of costuming, set construction, and their large talent pool. The Playhouse actually has a short YouTube video at their site about the production: <http://www.villageplayhouse.org/beautybeast.htm> (I can be seen in a couple of the rehearsal shots-eeek!).


Our Belle, Liz Shipe, is particularly good in a very demanding role. The musical has added two important songs for her, "Is This Home?" and "A Change In Me." She's on stage most of the show, and gets knocked around a bit, particularly in the second act confrontations with Gaston and his bully boys. Liz, who is a student in Musical Theatre at UW-Milwaukee, has a fine voice, is a very good actress, and has the potential to go far in her profession. She's supported by Nick Zadjel as the Beast, who is a fine tenor and handles the rather "Phantom of the Opera" inspired songs he is given very well.

Michael Renner has the role of Gaston, and has an excellent voice for the part, and has gotten the character's smarmy swagger down pat. Ryan Cappelman as Lumiere is a very athletic dancer, very good singer, and a skillful comic actor as well--all of which the part requires. Our Mrs. Potts, Judy Radtke, has the perfect singing voice for the role and projects a charming personality for the character, a major plus since she has to deal with the "teapot" costume, which is very hindering to movement.

Just because I haven't mentioned someone here by name doesn't mean they aren't good, there are just too many to mention. I've seldom seen a more uniform, and unified, effort from any cast, all the more remarkable since we range in age from literally six to over sixty. In just about any large cast I've been in there's usually one person who turns out to be a slacker, or sloppy, or so unmotivated you wonder why they bothered to try out at all. In this show, I haven't seen that.

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Gregory G. H. Rihn's Journal

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Below are the **20** most recent journal entries recorded in [Gregory G. H. Rihn's](#) LiveJournal:

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Wednesday, July 15th, 2009

11:09 am [More on "Beauty on the Beast".](#)

We've finished our first weekend and are all very happy with the way things have worked out. The show has played to good houses, and audience reaction has been excellent. "Be Our Guest" got an unprecedented show-stopping ovation on opening night, which was followed by a unanimous standing ovation at the end of the show, which I don't recall having had before. Admittedly, community arts audiences tend to be a bit "easy" for this sort of thing, salted as they are with family and friends of the performers, but I was impressed by the immediacy and spontaneity of the response, which underscores its sincerity to me.

A number of my friends made it to the Saturday show, at least one of whom pronounced it "miraculous." Indeed, the production staff have done a great lot with a very little. I hadn't known that opinion on the group's boards about doing the show was very divided as to whether it could be done decently on a community theatre budget, but that question has been decisively answered. A clever if simple set design helped immensely, as did the combined efforts of the costumers and cast to beg, borrow, scrounge, and make outfits. (As is frequently the case with me, my entire costume, from eyeglasses to shoes, came from my own closet--.) The small but talented orchestra provides the necessary musical support with great effect. The show continues this weekend, closing Sunday afternoon.

[\(Comment on this\)](#)

10:24 am [Chéri](#)

We went to the Downer Theatre July 5th to see "Chéri," the new film starring Michelle Pfeiffer and based on the novels "Chéri," and "Le Fin de Chéri" by Colette. Pfeiffer plays Lea de Lonval, the protagonist, who is the most influential of her generation of grandes horizontals, most of whom have now "retired". She is considering it as well, but hesitates, perhaps because she sees that the other members of her circle have decayed into a collection of more or less grotesque crones who only reminisce about their past conquests. Lea, who still possesses grand beauty and fabulous taste (as expressed in her smashing Belle Époque wardrobe and magnificent Art Moderne townhouse) grasps at the compromise offered her by friend Madame Peloux (Kathy Bates), which is to take up Peloux's son, Freddy (a.k.a. the "Chéri" of the title) (Rupert Friend), who is a handsome and dashing nineteen years old. The story tells us that the courtesan's son has been living a life of debauchery since he was sixteen, and his mother wants to save him from worse things. Both Lea and Cheri enter into the relationship willingly, and spend the next six years in an idyl, dividing their time between Lea's Paris house and her Normandy estate. (One rather fantasy element of the plot is that Lea and her friends all seem to have invested their earnings wisely, and are all comfortably rich, if not more so--.)

The long dream comes to an end when Madame Peloux decides that the next stage in raising her son is for him to marry, and she announces that she has arranged a marriage for him with the sheltered daughter of another compatriot, the not-yet-retired Marie Laure (Iben Hjejle). Putting supposed logic ahead of love, Lea and Chéri agree to his wedding young Edmee (Felicity Jones).

How events unravel to an unhappy end is the substance of the plot, which is well acted by Pfeiffer, Friend, and Jones, supported by the always interesting Bates and a cast of veteran European actors. The film is a visual treat, lushly photographed on locations in Paris, Biarritz, and sites in Germany, which probably stood in for Normandy. The dialog is witty and wicked, and there are some very tasteful sex scenes.

We enjoyed the film very much, and would recommend it for fans of art cinema. Obviously, the plot makes if appropriate for adults only: it carries an R rating, but it is a "soft" R.

[\(Comment on this\)](#)

Monday, July 13th, 2009

8:25 pm ["Beauty and the Beast" pictures](#)

There is a pretty decent photo set from the opening night performance at:

http://www.villageplayhouse.org/beauty_beast_photos.htm

[\(Comment on this\)](#)

Friday, July 10th, 2009

4:11 pm [Beauty and the Beast](#)

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The musical preserves the movie plot and augments it with a number of new songs. Of course it's difficult to translate an animated film to live theatre, but the script works well, and I think our costumes and staging 'read' right to give the necessary effect. I'm looking forward to having friends see it, to find out if they think its as good as I do.

Disney's BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
 July 10, 2009 7:30 PM
 West Allis Central High School Auditorium
 8516 West Lincoln Avenue
 West Allis, Wisconsin
 July 10, 2009 7:30 PM
 July 11, 2009 7:30 PM
 July 12, 2009 2:00 PM
 July 17 2009 7:30 PM
 July 18 2009 7:30 PM
 July 19, 2009 2:00 PM

(1 Comment (Comment on this))

Tuesday, July 7th, 2009

12:36 pm **[Night At the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian](#)**

We caught a matinee showing of "Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian," largely as research. Lee Schneider and company are planning to do "Night at the Museum" as the theme for this year's Lytheria Halloween. We hadn't rushed out to see the original, having borrowed the DVD from the library at the urging of friends, and had found it cute and funny. Suffice to say, that there's very little in the sequel that wasn't in the original, except a change of venue and some new bad guys. Moving the action to the Smithsonian Institution ("the world's largest museum") allows the writers an excuse to throw in anything they might have thought would be cool to play around with. Thus we see paintings on the walls such as Edward Hopper's "Nighthawks" and Grant Wood's "American Gothic," even though they belong at the Art Institute of Chicago. A cast of Rodin's "The Thinker" is found in the National Gallery of Art, which is on the Mall in Washington, D.C., but is not actually part of the Smithsonian Institution. And one wonders why the Smithsonian, which is primarily oriented toward things American, would even possess mannequins of Ivan the Terrible or Napoleon Bonaparte, although their presence might be explained by the supposed "archive storage" for other museums.

That being said, the negligible plot runs basically the bad guys and the good guys try to one-up each other in a running battle by recruiting more and more of the museum's animated exhibits. Ben Stiller, Robin Williams, Steve Coogan, and Owen Williams competently reprise their roles from the first film, although the best parts of the movie are Amy Adams as Amelia Earhart (Georgie said Earhart's character as depicted was correct in essence), and Hank Azaria as new villain Kamunrah. George Armstrong Custer, as played by Bill Hader, is given a role which I think portrays the historical man as uncharacteristically stupid rather than fatally arrogant. As a comedic adjunct to the film, he is totally overshadowed by Owen Wilson being Owen Wilson--.

The most annoying bit in the film is definitely Larry's (Stiller) confrontation with a childish Smithsonian guard, played by Jonah Hill. This playground-style "pissing match" is incredible and goes on too long, although it is a little bit redeemed when echoed by Napoleon (Alain Chabat) and Ivan (Christopher Guest) later on.

Verdict: Mildly amusing fluff for some afternoon when you don't have anything better to do. Cartoon style violence, no sex or bad language.

(Comment on this)

11:54 am **[Milwaukee Art Museum: "American Originals"](#)**

July 2nd, we went to the Milwaukee Art Museum to see the current travelling exhibits, two shows combined under the "American Originals" title.

The Artistic Furniture of Charles Rohlf's, features forty of this very imaginative American designer's furniture and decorative art pieces. This is the first major museum exhibit of Rohlf's work, and will travel to four other venues after Milwaukee. Charles Rohlf's was an interesting individual. He was a highly regarded student in his artistic and drawing classes, and worked for many years as a successful draughtsman and designer. He was also a semi-professional actor, and was married to successful author Anna Katharine Green Working on such pieces as castings for stove parts, he acquired a deep knowledge of materials and techniques that he put to



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[Rave reviews! Beauty and the Beast - Tosa Players + West Allis Players this weekend 7/17-7/19](#). **NOW Staff**, Moderator

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Meg

Posted: Thursday, July 16, 2009 12:33:51 PM



Rank: Advanced Member
Groups: Member

Nearly 900 people attended last weekends opening performances of Disney's Beauty and the Beast at West Allis Central H.S. and loved it! The production is the finest example of community theatre - an evenly talented cast of actors, singers, dancers and musicians.

My two children are in the show with at least 3 other Wauwatosa children. But the cast is an adult cast, nearly 90 persons strong.

Here is the link to the website with this last weekend of performance dates, downloadable coupon, and pictures from the show.

<http://www.villageplayhouse.org/beautybeast.htm>

Joined: 1/22/2007
Posts: 849
Location: Wauwatosa

Don't miss this one, everyone. It's truly entertainment for all ages!

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