

See below our Young Reviewers' reviews of Harrogate Theatre's home grown 2017-18 pantomime, Beauty and the Beast:

The chosen review:

A Beast of a show at Harrogate Theatre

The classic tale of girl meets beast with a modern French and Yorkshire twist, makes for one of the most hilarious and accessible performances in pantomime history.

The star of the panto has to be “enchante” Muddles (Tim Stedman) who sometimes gets muggled; sorry, I mean muddled. The excellent trio of his comical ‘bonjour’, a juggling masterclass and a split-tastic pun over confusion with a banana and bandana has the children rolling in laughter instantly.

Other notable characters include Belle (Maisey Bawden) who pours her heart out in a phenomenal melody of Jennifer Hudson's ‘I'm Telling You’ touching the hearts of the whole audience, as well as the Beast (Tom Bainbridge), a “beast by name, beast by nature”, who skilfully portrays the difficulties of someone who doesn't fit in or conform to society's expectations so is exposed to huge vulnerabilities.

Of course, all good pantos must include a villain and Harrogate Theatre doesn't disappoint. Mona Lisa (Katy Dean) brings sass in the form of the well-known Essex accent, appealing to teenagers with “well jell” and “shut up” ensuring there is plenty of “oh yes I did[s]” and “oh no you didn't[s]”.

What makes the performance so special has to be the script (written by Phil Lowe and David Bown). From the unfortunate turn of phrase ‘smashing’, to the jumbled discourse of ‘peasy

easy squeezy lemon' – the script is scattered with jokes without over doing it.

My personal highlight is the grand finale musical featuring chart toppers 'Sorry' and 'Despacito' alongside disco favourite 'Boogie Wonderland', produced by the sensational Musical Director Nick Lacey. This incredible musical performance appears under the backdrop of a vibrant blue and red neon lit set (Alexandra Stafford). These floor fillers allow the whole audience to sing along with appeal to both young and old.

Beauty and the Beast runs at Harrogate Theatre until Sunday 21st January. Box Office: 01423 502116

Lauren McGaun, Grammar School at Leeds

Here are the other Beauty and the Beast reviews:

Another “Belle”ter from Harrogate Theatre!

Harrogate Theatre's annual pantomime has triumphed once again, in extraordinary style. This year's production of Beauty and the Beast saw a number of familiar faces return to the stage, including Tim Stedman, Katy Dean and Phil Stewart, true veterans of the Harrogate stage.

The curtain rose to reveal the stunningly vibrant, detailed set of beautiful Paris, where details such as 'Le Shed' and Phil Stewart's accent "from an unknown region of what we'd like to call France" all added to the truly French atmosphere.

All of this was of course filled with fantastic acting, ambitious dance routines and incredible vocals from the whole cast, including the beautiful duet of Maisey Bawden (Belle) and Tom

Bainbridge (Beast). Truly astounding ability on show throughout this brilliant performance.

Not only is this a wonderful love story to be enjoyed by all the family, but the fantastic trio of Tim Stedman, Phil Stewart and Ross Waiton present classic pantomime comedy, with a combination of witty one liners, slapstick humour and some slightly tenuous references to popular culture. These three are intelligently funny on numerous levels, pleasing the entire audience. Their experience is evident and their timing impeccable, as they draw laugh after laugh from the audience.

Of course, no pantomime is complete without a villain and Katy Dean's Mona Lisa shines throughout. The broad Essex accent, audacious outfits and questionable motives suit her character to a tee as she orchestrates chaos throughout the show.

On the surface, pantomimes are hilarious, fantastical performances which can sometimes draw away from the talent and dedication of the team behind them, however, Harrogate Theatre's time, dedication and enthusiasm is evident, not only from a fantastic cast, but from so many others from musicians to set designers. Another outstanding job by Phil Lowe and David Bown means that once again Harrogate Theatre has put on, without doubt, a Beauty of a panto!

Beauty and the Beast, Harrogate Theatre, 6 Dec 2017 - 21 Jan 2018

James Murtagh, Ashville College

Beauty, the beast and the token fool

As is standard, this year the pantomime team at Harrogate theatre have crafted a spectacle, glamourizing flawlessly an old tested tale while adding their own flamboyance.

The pantomime didn't come without fault - the occasional dropping of a line, the predictable formula and the stubborn gentleman who always seems reluctant to participate, presumably without warning. But all in all, it's a sound production, and has a very likeable villain known as Mona Lisa (Katy Dean) almost making the beast (Tom Bainbridge) seem deserving of his eternal damning.

Refreshingly, this years production ends on a high, with said villain being invited to the wedding of Belle (Maisey Bawden) and the once-beast-turned-prince, this sends a positive message of forgiveness and empathy, which is wonderful especially considering the number of young impressionable people in the audience.

The production left a lasting impression on me, which is rare for the typically repetitive methodical pantomime. Harrogate theatre has upped the ante with regards to fresh ideas and spruced up sets, it's just a terrible shame that the attempts to remain relevant with regards to music choice, dance moves, pop culture references etc. fell so completely flat. However there is something always relatively charming in these attempts, almost to confirm that they care for their demographic – making it feel surprisingly welcoming to all audiences.

So in conclusion, its not perfect, not by any means, but as every year it holds a unique charm that is very difficult to capture and somehow brilliantly executed yet again.

Chris Booley, King James School

Why 'Beauty and the Beast' is a must see for all

Anybody who is looking for a good laugh Harrogate Theatre's hilarious rendition of the animated Disney classic 'Beauty and the Beast' is the place to go. The pantomime is created to be thoroughly enjoyable for all ages, whether or not you've seen the Disney movie to follow along with the plot. Glancing around the theatre beaming grins are seen all around on all ages.

It's a brilliant performance from the cast as a whole: the actors, dancers, and behind the scenes crew, including Director (Phil Lowe), script writers (Phil Lowe and David Bown) down to the lighting design by Alexandra Stafford.

'Pam au Chocolat' played by Philip Stewart, and 'Muddles' played by resident crowd favourite Tim Stedman have the important job of keeping the audience entertained and involved as much as possible even going to the extent as singling out a fellow audience member from the front row to pick on throughout the performance. *It's all meant in good fun!*

Now pantomime isn't pantomime without slapstick comedy (which is a constant throughout) typically this production does not stick to the main plot of the Disney version so if you are looking for a replica this may not be your 'cup of tea' That being said this production is a must for anyone ranging from aged 4 to aged 80 plus. The production is filled with grand comedic timing but is also includes a few heartfelt scenes, typically involving Belle (Maisey Bawden) and The Beast (Tom Bainbridge) as they are the 'star crossed' lovers destined to be couple.

If you happen to see the production this will be one to remember and a memory cherished for years to come.

*Beauty and the Beast, Harrogate Theatre, Harrogate -
continuing on till Sunday 21st January 2018*

Stacy Taylor, Harrogate High School

Beauty rose from the Beast at Harrogate Theatre

Enchanting and delightful, Harrogate Theatre's production of Beauty and the Beast was no beast, but pure beauty. Incorporating all the delights of a traditional pantomime, with audience participation, dreadful yet hilarious puns and the classic "he's behind you!" Phil Lowe (co-writer and director) and David Bown (co-writer) have created another fantastic show.

Set in the beautiful city of Paris, as seen through Foxton's incredible scenery, it's as if you are dining at Bon Bon's patisserie! Bewildering costume and scene changes leave everyone perplexed, with even the adults believing in the magic. Both the new and old cast members never fail to give a smashing performance.

Belle (a beautiful girl with her nose in a book) played by Maisey Bawden, is sacrificed for her father's (Ross Waiton) life, when he takes a rose from the Beast's (Tom Bainbridge) garden. Trapped in the palace walls, much to Mona Lisa's (Katy Dean) horror, Belle receives support from the ever helpful and glamorous Pam Au Chocolat (Phil Stewart), whose dresses could have a sellout show of their own!

Muddles (Tim Stedman, celebrating his 18th pantomime with Harrogate) is as clumsy as one can be, however you cannot help but adore his "magical" charm. He helps Belle by adding his own rather unique brand of support. With his comedic and lovable personality, Muddles makes everyday chores exciting,

as he captures the children's imagination much to the *delight of the parents!*

The talent of the cast turns the classic fairytale into a truly memorable evening for all, and at the final curtain we are saddened to say goodbye to the characters that we now regard as friends. Leaving the theatre it is a true delight to hear the sounds of laughter and praise from the entire audience, old and young alike.

Beauty and the Beast runs at Harrogate Theatre until Sunday 21st January. Box office 01423 502 116.

Millie Hope, Harrogate Grammar School

Worth seeing the Panto? Oh yes it is!

Harrogate panto is considered something of a festive tradition by many local families, and I recently had the pleasure of discovering why. *Beauty and the Beast* boasts truly gorgeous set designs by Richard Foxton, giving a glittering sense of enchantment and transporting the audience to a fairy tale fashioned France; allowing a -somewhat exhaustive- typical set of panto jokes about the French. With a cast of huge talents such as the soulful star Maisey Bawden as Belle; this is one true beauty of a show.

Opening with an instant and captivating energy to *Shut Up and Dance* originally by Walk the Moon, the audience is immediately engaged, clapping and singing along to songs which played anywhere other than in a pantomime would most likely evoke only groans and eye rolls. This lively spirit is kept present throughout the narrative by the eloquent Phil Stewart as the Dame and the ever-enthusiastic Tim Stedman proving

himself a true panto legend, this being his 18th year as the beloved buffoon.

The story is well known and loved by the kids and adults alike, and David Bown and Phil Lowe's adaptation retains the essence of the classic romantic story, giving a child-like sense of wonder, and even having rather profound moments between the two lovers on stage; all mixed together in a joyous chaos of fun family humour. Bawden and Bainbridge (the Beast) as the leading lovers were phenomenal in their voices and their sheer presence, bringing the fairy tale to life in a very Disney-esque manner. This shone especially bright in their rendition of Tale as Old as Time, which was exactly as magical and moving as theatre ought to be.

In complete honesty, I walked in feeling a little silly to be watching a panto as neither a small child or the reluctant parent of one, expecting to be bored out of my millennial mind by the end. Instead, I was overwhelmed by the most welcome sense of nostalgia. Rest assured whatever your age, you will leave this show with a smile on your face and a song stuck in your head.

Beauty and the Beast runs at Harrogate Theatre until 21st January.

Jasmin Read, St Aiden's