

Kids' Theater Review: 'Beauty and the Beast' at SecondStory Repertory

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By Gemma Alexander

Completing this season's Theater for Young Audiences series at [SecondStory Repertory](#), its production of the musical [Beauty and the Beast](#) holds more in common with the original fairy tale than the Disney movie. The play is targeted to elementary students,

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but families with smaller children are encouraged to attend special all-ages performances on Sundays.

Before the Sunday performance I attended, the young audience receives an orientation to the production. After an explanation that this story is a lot about overcoming your fears, all of the scary sound effects are sampled. Then Adrian Cerrato, in costume but not in character as the Beast, comes on stage to show how it's all just pretend. After the performance, the cast lines up in the lobby to say hello and answer questions. Judging by the time it takes to clear the lobby, kids have a lot of questions to ask.

During the play itself there are a few nods to the fact that this is a show for kids: Belle squeals at the sight of a spider, she sleeps with a lovey (a stuffed dachshund named Jane), and the audience is encouraged to howl along with the Beast. But aside from these humorous moments, *Beauty and the Beast* does not present a childish interpretation of the story.

This version of the fairy tale, written by Charles Way, holds its audience to a high standard. Belle's sister is given a romantic subplot, and the characters are quite three-dimensional. Some of them are not even who they claim to be. Likewise, the songs by Kevin Miller and Clay Zambo take more from the tradition of Andrew Lloyd Weber than sing-along animated movies. The theater's faith in the audience was not misplaced, as even the youngest children remained rapt throughout the 70 minute

performance.

Angelica Duncan as Belle shines in the musical numbers. However, her transformation from timid wallflower to courageous heroine (largely taking place in an offstage adventure on the moor) is strangely underdeveloped, even as it forms the central message of the story. Since her romance with the Beast is a foregone conclusion, there is more room to explore the secondary characters. Matthew Gilbert is entertaining in a double role as the fraud adventurer who woos Belle's sister in London, and again as the fake farmer in Devon. The shallow sister Cassandra (Sara Trowbridge) gets all the best lines as she learns through hardship and poverty to value love over appearances, even as she clings to her vanity. Belle's father, played by Sean Mitchell, is as flawed a man as he is a caring parent. In contrast to Belle's fears, he takes ridiculous risks, causing problems for everyone he loves despite his good intentions. Cindy Whiston is delightfully creepy as the Beast's housekeeper.

Beauty and the Beast is a creative and thought-provoking retelling of the fairy tale that keeps kids engaged even after the show is over.

If you go:

When: Ends May 27. Final performances are Friday, May 25 at 7 p.m.; May 26-27: Saturday-Sunday, 1 p.m., 4 p.m.

Where: [SecondStory Repertory](#) at Redmond Town Center

Tickets: On Friday and Saturday all tickets are \$10 per person; on

Sunday tickets for children ages 1-3 are \$5 and infants are free.

[Buy tickets online.](#)

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