



ST EDMUND'S
SCHOOL
CANTERBURY



Beauty and the Beast Review

"It has been these kinds of activities that we have all missed so much in the past two years. It was only last night I fully appreciated just how much of a hole in school life had been created. These productions may not directly impact hard metrics like exam results but they do something far more important but less tangible. They create the very culture of the school - building connections across year groups and houses and make the children feel like they belong to something special. It even made me wish I'd gone to a school like St Ed's."

St Edmund's Parent



Eh bien! If you were not Our Guest at one of the five performances of *Beauty and the Beast* then you missed out on something very special. When Mr Sell announced that the Drama department was back 'with a vengeance' after the necessary constraints and restrictions imposed by the pandemic he was not kidding. Quelle surprise! A cast of 86, a collection of over 200 costumes and a unique script, penned on the kitchen table by our exceptionally talented Howard Sykes. That is not doing things by halves.



When I put down my pen after reviewing *Chicago* I thought that was it – I'd seen a school production that couldn't be topped. And then came Covid: lockdowns with remote learning, followed by 'bubbles' and a ban on virtually all co-curricular activity. We helped each other get through it. But we lost so much: the fun, the joy, the social interaction. They say you don't appreciate what you have until it's taken away. We lost live theatre for virtually a year and a half – and all that goes with it. So to be back at long last inside St Edmund's theatre, watching a live performance, was a treat to be savoured. And what a treat. It was as if all the fun and enjoyment that we had missed had been captured and released with a flourish, such was the colour, the energy and the exuberance to be found in our performers.



Although this was a pantomime, with larger than life characters – the set was naturalistic and the French village square, which the audience walked through to reach their seats, set the scene perfectly. The official start times were 7:30pm and 2:30pm but there was, in fact, action from 7pm/2pm and you would have been mad not to arrive early to enjoy the pre-show entertainment.





How French to be encouraged to take a seat and watch the world go by, doing its thing, whether its thing was to dance around a maypole – confidently demonstrated by the graceful Junior School Maypole Village Dancers – sell bread from a stall, grab a drink at the enchanting café – Chez Lucia (a fun nod to the Walker-Reid dynasty) – or gather on the street corner for a gossip.

We were serenaded first by Isobel Kimber who sang *If I Ain't Got You* exquisitely and then, later, by Jacob Storey, who enchanted all with *La Vie en Rose*. The Villagers danced to the ballads and then made way for some attractively choreographed folk dancing, confidently undertaken by our Senior School dancers (Aurielle, Dali and Margot) in striking gold skirts and peasant waistbands.



The French accordion music added to the general ambience and it was clear that we had crossed the channel to do our bit for Anglo-French relations: British panto meets seventeenth century Baroque French theatre.



And so it was that we were presented with an outdoor presentation by the Village Players of Apuleius's tale of Cupid and Psyche. This was tremendous fun. The six pupils' fast paced story-telling recounted an old Greek tale with actions and twenty-first century touches that amused and amazed in equal measure – such assured delivery in ones so young. There were some lovely throw-away lines: the “well jel” sisters reacting unfavourably to Psyche's eventual good fortune, and yes, I'm sure Greta Thunberg was eating her heart out. All this from pupils who were still in or had only recently left Junior School. What delights we have in store for the future, with this young band of talented actors to call upon. The Drama department can be confident that there is talent to draw upon for years to come. And this was just the hors d'oeuvres!



After a formal announcement from the narrator the action of the main story begins and our village of Little Town bursts forth with a flurry of activity and we are launched into the first big musical number, familiar to any fans of the Disney version of this famous tale. This is lively and so full of colour – red, white and blue predominates – that it cannot fail to uplift and excite. The clever script reminds us that Dotty Doolittle has been seen in the market place waiting to be “double jabbed” (met with an approving ‘thumbs up’ from Martine, one of the Girls – couldn't agree more, Mr Sell) and we gain our first glimpse of the egotistical Count Casonova over whom the Girls all swoon. And what swooning! The Girls – Main and Infiltration cast alike – were mesmerising: they *oo*-ed and *ah*-ed with such enthusiasm and devotion to their god.



Here is where I take my hat off to the Junior School Girls – they may have been half the size of their Senior School counterparts but they could pout and swoon just as convincingly as their elders – and Casanova responded superlatively to the Infiltration, treating them with equal disdain. Sheer joy to behold, the Girls were absolutely superb in their rendition of *Queen's Lover Boy* in Act II, taking superfandom to a whole new level. Let's not forget, too, that the 'Girls', here, included the wonderful Robert, convincingly portrayed by George Gannon.



As for Casanova himself, Oliver Futchler embraced the role wholeheartedly and revelled in the adoration from girlfriends and audience alike. Superbly cast, he swaggered and pranced across the stage with a pantomime arrogance that was a delight to behold. (Fans of Blackadder will have recognised more than a hint of Rik Mayall's glorious Lord Flashheart in Oliver's performance.) Oliver's comic timing was beautifully employed in his repartee with French Franc, who was superbly played by Finbar Taylor-Jones...



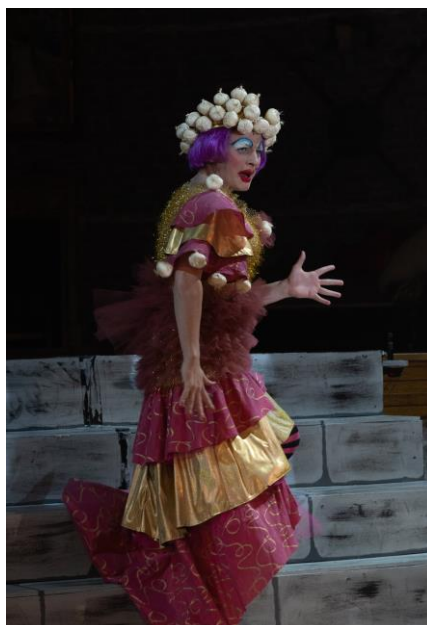
...and, in the Infiltration, by the comic powerhouse Isla Anderson. As for French Franc's classic pencilled French moustache – who doesn't like a pantomime costume cliché?



The juxtaposition of 'pantomime' and 'costume' brings us neatly to Dotty Doolittle. What to say of Will Vant's pantomime dame? S/he was a revelation. Played with jaw-dropping assurance by Will, this dame was outrageous and yet warm and personable.



With 10 full costume changes to negotiate Will must have needed an army of helpers back stage drilled to split-second timing in order to exchange buns for heads of garlic, stripey stockings here, plain legs there, bloomers, white boots, black boots, croissants boots. How Will managed to walk so effortlessly in his array of footwear was astonishing and possibly a little worrying... . My altogether favourite outfit was Dotty's funeral garb, complete with tissue box hat: chic with a utilitarian twist. Fantastique!



Of course this being live theatre, the unplanned happens. So in Friday's matinee there is a wardrobe malfunction with Dotty's wig, when the two are briefly separated and we see the dame's denuded noggin. This is where we witnessed first-hand the professionalism of the lead roles – Will and Freya – who braved this out – in character – to the point that the audience was overheard to ask whether the de-wigging had been scripted or not. Expertly navigated.



Freya Reilly's Belle was demure and innocent but with enough sass – as evidenced in the reprise of *Remember me* at the castle when she is sending her mother, Dotty, off (“Don't make it any harder”) – to prevent her from being the saccharine goody-two-shoes that the role could easily become. Instead, we witnessed a winning combination of gentleness, grace and good humour.



We could almost believe that Belle was Dotty's daughter, with a mischievous humour and appreciation of the absurd lurking just below the surface. Beautiful and elegant, it is not surprising that our Prince Claude of Bourbon fell in love with her.



But could Belle fall in love with the Prince? After all, "just how bad can a biscuit be"?!



Off we head to the castle where the poor servants sing about their *Hard Knock Life* with stunningly choreographed dancing, impressive gymnastics and some outstanding vocal work by Isobel Kimber.

Edith Burton and Lucia Walker-Reid managed some rapid costume changes themselves to double-up as love-worn village Girls and work-worn Servants, dancing with both ensembles with energy to spare.

We enjoyed two very different Harriets with Olivia Harris-Harding carrying off an impressively consistent Northern accent – with an air of sophistication and experienced professionalism - while the Infiltration's Violet Vant (keeping it in the family) was a vibrant, youthful secretary, keen to impress her employer.



The employer, Prince Claude, was, however, difficult to impress. Henry Coupe's Prince was intolerant of his staff and all those around him, emanating a disinterest and ennui that was in severe need of intervention by Esme's bewitching Enchantress Kindheart, disguised as a hag.



We were reminded that “Beauty is found within” at which point, with some impressive stage magic, the Prince is transformed – drum roll – into a monstrous beast.

Flossie Andrews infiltrated as the Enchantress, bringing real edge and menace to the character...



The beastly transformation – reminiscent of the portrayal of Frankenstein’s monster by Benedict Cumberbatch/Jonny Lee Miller - was just one of many theatrical special effects which would have challenged a professional stage crew, let alone a group of school pupils. We enjoyed flashes and bangs, a stroboscopic run-around, and clever sound reverberation as the word ‘rose’ echoed around the castle. And then there was the Magic Mat gag. “You step on the Magic Mat; you ask for things and you get them”. We got sugar, a little flower (not a typo!), three real eggs and water cascading from above: predictable, risky and very, very funny.

Of course gags like this work because they are associated with the appropriate wah-wah of a muted trumpet. Our trumpeter, Jonty, is still only in Middle Fifth, as is our clarinettist, Thomas. How lucky we are! The opportunity these pupils have to play with professionals in such a production is huge and our pupils embraced the experience with the engagement and commitment you would expect. It’s easy not to notice the musicians when they’re playing that well – and the same is true of the background vocals. The Village Singers were on show throughout and provided reliable support in the big group numbers – unsung heros, almost.



I could go on. I could mention the set, a princely castle built from scratch, in-house, by Jayden Lewis and his team, the props – such as the incredible tree arms of the Black Forest – or the clever choreography of the flexible prison bars in *Remember Me*. There should be a shout-out for the costumes in general – their French theme – their inventiveness – their flair and colour. This was a veritable theatrical tour de force, thanks to the creative genius of Tamra Walker-Reid and her team..





The cast may have sung of *One Night, One Moment*, but this was several nights of many moments. We will all have our favourites.





And yet the finale – the reprise of *One Night* – somehow captured what getting involved in a production like this is all about: months of hard work, commitment and dedication, to create moments in time that are so special that they stay with us for the rest of our lives.

The relationships we forge, the memories we make: these are what carry us through difficult times. And this is why we owe a huge debt of thanks to Mark Sell and his team. What joy! What exuberance! Truly, an embodiment of joie de vivre. Bravo!

Dr Cathy Sotillo

Director of Studies





Cast

Main Cast

Harriet - Olivia Harris Harding
Belle - Freya Reilly
Dotty Doolittle - Will Vant
French Franc - Finbar Taylor-Jones
Count Casanova - Oliver Futchter
Prince Claude of Bourbon - Henry Coupe
Enchantress Kindheart/Hag - Esme O'Connor

The Girls

Maude - Hattie Pickles
Etienne - Daisy Marsh
Gigi - Lucy Carolan-Evans
Martine - Matilda Marriner
Veronique - Edith Burton
Amelie - Lucia Walker-Reid
Robert - George Gannon

The Servants

Mabel - Isobel Kimber
Jacques - Theo Bawtree
Philippe - Jacob Storey
Sylvie - Gabrielle Scott-Kilvert
Marcel - Billy Boarman-Powell
Pookie - Anna Mc Cabe

The Village Dancers

Yasmin Wilson, Aurielle
Blench, Mia Jenkinson,
Dali Tabony, Margot Ali

The Ensemble Servants

Jodie Hughes, Olivia Johnson,
Olivia Standen, Stella Rogers,
Gabriela Nacif-Higson,
Lucy Hollingsbee

The Ensemble Villagers

Brook Davis,
Sage Stringer,
Betsy Thorne,
Kristina Somai,
Lottie Haylor

The Village Singers

Clara Taylor, Emily Press,
Scarlett Newman-Cousins, Tilly Perry,
Zoe Rogers, Maisie Wright

The Village Players/Villagers - Edward Underwood, Joe Goodwin,
Hetty Moran, Setayesh Kalantari Khandani, Freddie Bickley, Poppy
Gower **Maypole Village Dancers** - Grace Harvey,
Alexander Strzeminski-Bowden, Alexa Power, Imogen Fogg,
Solomon Wainwright, Emma Sharp-Kinsey



Main Cast
Harriet - Violet Vant
Belle - Freya Reilly
Dotty - Doolittle Will Vant
French Franc - Isla Anderson
Count Casanova - Oliver Futchter
Prince Claude of Bourbon - Henry Coupe
Enchantress Kindheart/Hag - Flossie Andrews

The Servants

Mabel - Isobel Kimber
Jacques - Alfie Allan
Philippe - Benjamin Hancock
Sylvie - Gabrielle Scott-Kilvert
Marcel - Billy Boarman-Powell
Pookie - Betsy Coultard

The Girls

Maude - Poppy Hendy
Etenne - Ellana Rogers-Bricout
Gigi - Aggie Hudson
Martine - Bea Alexander
Veronique - Edith Burton
Amelle - Lucia Walker-Reid
Robert - George Gannon

The Ensemble Servants

Jacob Storey, Dolly Parsons, Naomi Power, Tabatha White, Laila O Sullivan, Charlotte Elworthy, Lexie Wilkinson, Alice Florence

The Village Dancers

Yasmin Wilson, Aurielle Blench, Mia Jenkinson, Dali Tabony, Margot Ali

The Village Singers

Clara Taylor, Emily Press, Scarlett Newman-Cousins, Tilly Perry, Zoe Rogers, Maisie Wright

The Ensemble Villagers

Brook Davis, Evie Brown, Sophie Clapp, Kristina Somai

The Village Players/Villagers - Joran Kearney, Joe Goodwin, Sophie Burgess, Amy Hopkins, Freddie Bickley, Poppy Gower
Maypole Village Dancers - Grace Harvey, Alexander Strzeminski-Bowden, Alexa Power, Imogen Fogg, Solomon Wainwright, Emma Sharp-Kinsey



The Band

Musical Director/Vocal Coach - Dr Victoria Rowcroft

Conductor - Ian Swatman

Musical Orchestrations - Ed Mayo

Musicians

Trumpet - Jonty Harris-Harding

Clarinet - Thomas Young

French Horn - Orlando Barton Hodges

Trombone - Steve McIntyre & Frederick Butler

Keyboards - Spencer Payne

Keyboards - Richard Dray

Bass - Martin Elliott

Drums/Percussion - Stephen Brown



Adapted by - Howard Sykes

Director - Mark Sell

Assistant Director - Howard Sykes

Choreographer - Lisa Jayn Gordon

Dance Captain - Lucia Walker-Reid

Director of the Village Players - Aimee Walker-Reid

Set Design - Jayden Lewis, Tamra Walker-Reid, Catherine Knowles Lenoir

Scenic Artists - Catherine Knowles Lenoir, Lucia Walker-Reid

Ellie Walker-Reid (Village Tree)

Props - Tamra Walker-Reid, Catherine Knowles Lenoir, Ruby Coupe

Creative Team - Tamra Walker Reid, Jayden Lewis, Catherine Knowles Lenoir,

Aimee Walker-Reid, Lucia Walker-Reid, Ellie Walker-Reid,

Henry Coupe, Ruby Coupe, Tor Lorentzen

Costume and Wig Design - Tamra Walker-Reid, Aimee Walker-Reid

Hair and Makeup - Ellie Walker-Reid, Ella Swatman, Sneha Shrestha,

Elianna Webster, Tilly Henderson, Rosie Peckett-Hill

Dressers - Tamra Walker-Reid, Aimee Walker-Reid, Ellie Walker-Reid

Runners - Hani Lynch, Annabel Ogston Lemmens

Company and Back Stage Manger - Tamra Walker-Reid

Stage crew - Tor Lorentzen, Charlie Emson, Toby Annett-Baker,

Oliver Stokes, Cameron Crouch, Ruby Coupe, Catherine Knowles Lenoir

Follow spot - Tobiah Almand, Lynda Nichol

Lighting design - Stuart Gain, Jayden Lewis, Mark Sell

Lighting and Design Operator - Jayden Lewis

Sound - Pete Brown

With special thanks to: Dunn's Bakery, Chris Elworthy- Plumford Farms, Jackie Burden, Dave le Hegerat, Peter Cook, Marie Rollinson and the Marketing Team, Yvonne King, Chaperones and anyone else who has helped with the show.