

Youth and Experience Lead Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*

By John Lieder

I truly enjoy just about all things Disney, having grown up watching *The Wonderful World of Color* every Sunday afternoon. (For you young folk, that's back when color televisions were brand new.) I have been especially fond of Disney's full feature animated productions. However, by the time Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* hit the movie theatres in 1991, our two oldest boys were at the "that's kid's stuff" age and the youngest was too young to take to the cinema. Somehow I missed out on the opportunity to get familiar with this delightful film, which was nominated for a best picture Academy Award and considered by many to be the best Disney animated feature ever.

The stage version opened on Broadway on April 18, 1994, and after 3800 performances, continues to delight audiences. Directed, by **Jason Wiggins**, this summer's Community Players' production of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* is being led by three young performers with wonderful voices and on-target characterizations: **Rebekah Strauss** as Belle, **Matt Sergot** as Gaston and **Jake Olbert** as The Beast. **Brian Artman** as Maruice, **Reena Rhoda** as Mrs. Potts, **Karen Clark** as Madame de la Grande Bouche and **Tom Smith** as Cogsworth lend their veteran experience to a talented cast. **Nick McBurney**, who I suppose by now qualifies as one of our "youthful veterans," is the candlestick-with-the-French-accent, Lumiere. (Not once during the rehearsal did he remind me of that French guard in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Good work!)

There are some wonderful little accent marks in this production: Little **Bronke Kiley** as Chip the Teacup, lights up the stage with her expressions, although all you see of her is her face. The three "silly girls," **Megan Clark**, **Justine Harris** and **Whitney Spencer** are obviously having great fun going gaga for Gaston, and **Justin Palm** is a hoot as Gaston's sidekick, Lefou.

Bruce Parrish has designed the set so that the downstage section serves for the village scenes and the upstage half provides the setting for the castle scenes. When the multi-level "castle" is not needed, it is masked by the mid-stage curtain. Bruce also makes use of a multi-purpose mobile piece that transforms from Belle's house to the interior of the tavern.

The costumes, of course, make a major contribution to this production. How else are you going to get the audience to believe that a teapot, candlestick and clock can talk? Costume

designer **Cathy Sutliff** has rented the fantasy costumes from a high school in Utah. It took a semi-trailer truck to deliver them. All the villager costumes were coordinated by Cathy, who tried to find a happy medium between eighteenth-century France and Disney.

Gayle Miller and **Luci Rice** were very helpful in getting all the repairs and alterations finished.



The chorus is well tuned by music director **Melody Palm**. **Whitney Spencer** is choreographer. Lighting design is being done by **Tamara Harvell** and **Tony Meizelis**; properties are being scrounged by **Carol Plotkin** and **Judy Stoh**; **Rich Plotkin** returns to the sound booth; and **Bryan Fischer** is stage manager.

My three sons are old enough now to enjoy children's stories again, so I'll make sure they all get their tickets. (Then we may all go over to the older boys' apartment and watch the DVD of the film on their HDTV!) This is much more than just something you might have come across in Kiddy Lit. It is a beautiful story of hope, faith and true love, with award winning music and some of the most remarkable costumes we've had on the CP stage. This show is definitely intended for "children of all ages."

The pay-what-you-can Preview performance is Thursday, July 13. Other performances are July 14-16, 20-23, 27-30. Please remember that, starting with this production, all Thursday, Friday and Saturday performances begin at 7:30. Sunday matinees curtain times remain at 2:30.

(Ed. Note: John's rehearsal pictures for *Beauty and the Beast* can be found on Page 4.)

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COMMUNITY PLAYERS
Calendar

July - August 2006

Board Meetings

July 18, 6:00 p.m.
August 9, 6:00 p.m.
Community Players Theatre

Beauty and the Beast

Preview: July 13
Shows: July 14-16, 20-23, 27-30.
Community Players Theatre

Meet the Directors Open House

July 18, 7:00 p.m.
Community Players Theatre

**Over the River and
through the Woods**

Auditions: July 24, 25
Community Players Theatre

All evening perfor-
mances begin at 7:30.



Community Players

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Newsletter Committee

Jim Kalmbach
John Lieder
Bob McLaughlin
Roland Spies
Joann Yant

We are always looking for writers,
artists, designers and story ideas.

Send comments and suggestions
to lieder78@yahoo.com

Over the River and through the Woods Auditions

Community Players will kick off its 2006-2007 season with *Over the River and through the Woods*, by Joe Dipietro, a hilarious comedy in the tradition of *Beau Jest*. It's set in New Jersey, where Nick, a dutiful Italian-American grandson, visits his four grandparents for dinner every Sunday . . . until, that is, he's offered his dream job at a company in Seattle. The grandparents (Frank, Aida, Nunzio, and Emma) don't want their only local relative to move across the country and so begin a series of schemes to keep Nick in New Jersey. One of them involves setting up an attractive young woman, Caitlin O'Hare, as a potential love interest for Nick.



Director **Carolyn Beyer** will be casting three men and three women. Auditions will be held Monday July 24 and Tuesday July 25. Actors will be asked to read from the script. Performances will be September 8-10, 14-17, and 21-23, with a pay-what-you-can preview on September 7.



Players Announce 2006-7 Board of Governors

At the membership meeting on March 12, the following people were elected to the Board of Governors.

Treasurer - **Jason Wiggins**
Playreading - **Sally Parry**
House and Grounds - **John Lieder**
Theatre Tech - **Brian Artman**
Membership - **Roland Spies**

In addition, **Deb Smith**, who had been VP/President-elect, has become president and **Alan Wilson** has become VP/Past President.

Those who are now serving the second year of a two-year term are

Theatre Crafts - **Eddy Arteman**
Box Office - **Tom Smith**
Marketing - **Cathy Sutliff**
Secretary - **Jean Lieder**, (Jean was appointed to fill the vacancy left by **Ellen Thomas'** resignation.)

Congratulations to all!

Meet the Directors Open House

Community Players will host "Meet the Directors" Night on Tuesday, July 18 starting at 7 pm at the Community Players Theatre.

"Meet the Directors" night is an hour where people can learn more about Community Players, the shows produced, and how to get involved. Directors and producers for all five productions for the 2006-2007 season will be available to discuss their shows.

Scripts, music and images of past productions will be available and tours of the theatre building will be offered. Two season tickets will be given away as a door prize.

For more information call Cathy Sutliff at 309-828-7471.

Volunteers Needed

In preparation for the Meet the Directors Open House, John Lieder, House and Ground Chair, needs volunteers to help with cleaning the theatre. We will begin at 9:00 AM on Saturday, July 15, and we hope to be done by noon.

Mariano, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, and the Tony Awards

by Bob McLaughlin

I've been to the Tony Awards before, but this year was the first time I sat in the audience crossing my fingers because I knew one of the nominees. As we reported last month, Community Players veteran **Mariano Tolentino** (*1776*, *My Fair Lady*, *How to Succeed*, *Stalag 17*, and many others) is an Associate Producer for the wonderful new musical *The Drowsy Chaperone*. Set in a dreary New York City apartment, the play is narrated by Man in Chair, who offers to share with us the cast recording of his favorite 1920s musical, *The Drowsy Chaperone*. As he plays it, the show comes alive in the apartment, and we see the fun and complications surrounding the upcoming marriage of a Broadway star and a wealthy young man. Man in Chair continually comments on the show, giving us background information on the fictional actors who are playing the roles, pointing out his favorite parts while skipping some others, and offering advice, like, the next song has a beautiful melody, but don't listen to the lyrics. Naturally, there's a happy ending, for all the characters and for Man in Chair.

Mariano learned about *The Drowsy Chaperone* from a friend, Dr. Raymond Poliquit, with whom he had invested in *Chita Rivera: A Dancer's Life*. He met the lead producer, Roy Miller, and researched the very successful backgrounds of the cast, led by Tony-winner Sutton Foster, and the creative team. What he learned, plus the sheer originality of the show, convinced him to take a deep breath and make the investment.

After a tryout in Los Angeles, *The Drowsy Chaperone* began performances at the Marquis Theater on Broadway in April, and opened on May 1. A large Bloomington contingent, including **Bruce and Kathy Parrish, Penny Wilson, Deb Smith**, and **Taylor Phillips**, went east for the opening and hobnobbed with the stars afterward at the Tavern on the Green. The reviews were generally strong and the word of mouth outstanding. The show picked up thirteen Tony Award nominations, including one for Best Musical. Thus, there we were on Sunday, June 11, Mariano and his guest Taylor Phillips in the orchestra with the other nominees, me and Sally Parry in the first mezzanine with our fingers crossed.

The evening started out well for *Chaperone* as it picked up the awards for best costumes and scenic design and for best book and best score; later Beth Leavel, who plays the perpetually tipsy title character, won for best featured actress. *Chaperone* also offered the first musical number of the evening, "Show Off," in which bride-to-be Sutton Foster tries to convince all assembled that she really wants to give up show business for marriage, all the while doing cartwheels, playing the xylophone, escaping from straitjackets, practicing

ventriloquism, and never failing to keep her best side to the news photographers. Mariano reports that during a commercial break, Roy Miller reminded him that if *Chaperone* were named Best Musical, they had only ninety seconds for the acceptance speech, so they had to sprint to the stage. He says, "I never thought I'd even remotely hear that possibility—ever! Be on stage and accepting a Tony!!"

Unfortunately, despite fingers numb from crossing, the Best Musical Tony went to *Jersey Boys* (a jukebox musical! bleah!), so Mariano didn't get to make that sprint to the stage. Still, it was a good night for *Chaperone*—five Tonys, more than any other musical, and the exposure from the national broadcast contributed to a huge box-office boost the following week. It was also a good night for Mariano, as he describes it: "At times during the ceremony, I'd find myself stepping back and be in awe at everything and everyone around me, then suddenly realize that I'm really part of it!! That I'm actually part of this whole glorious celebration!"

Mariano is grateful to Dr. Poliquit for having opened this opportunity to him and to Roy Miller. Through Mr. Miller, Mariano has already jumped into his next project. He is co-producer of *For the Glory*, a revised version of Frank Wildhorn's *The Civil War*, which just opened at the Majestic Theater in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. For the next several years, it will play every summer from June to Labor Day.

Bravo to Mariano for doing what we've all dreamed of doing, and here's hoping that before too long he'll be back at Radio City with another show competing for the Tony Award.



Mariano Tolentino and Taylor Phillips at the 2006 Tonys.
Photo by Bob McLaughlin

Community Players Takes Beginning Steps toward Building Plan

If you've been around this venerable 40-year-old building awhile, you've become painfully aware of some of its shortcomings: Not enough wing space, not enough restrooms, inconvenient dressing rooms, and the list goes on. Initial steps are being taken to solve at least most of those problems. Earlier this year, Treasurer Jason Wiggins invited several architectural firms to give us a bid for design services. Three firms actually took a tour of the building and did a preliminary needs analysis. An official bid of \$14,500 for design services was received by BLDD Architects, Inc. The Board of Governors accepted the bid and is now preparing to meet with BLDD to perform a thorough needs analysis. In order to optimize our time with the architects, a separate facilitated session was held on the Players stage on Sunday, June 25. The 90-minute meeting included board members and other interested parties. Led by professional facilitator Teresa Hering of State Farm, the group came up with the following key objectives. Although they are listed in descending order of importance, you'll notice that several of these items interrelate and none of them is unimportant:

- 1) Improve our patrons' theatre experience
- 2) Support our theatrical production capability
- 3) Generate additional revenue
- 4) Positively impact the organization's image
- 5) Facilitate theatre education opportunities
- 6) Control expenses (e.g. via more efficient heating/cooling)
- 7) Provide event flexibility
- 8) Minimize risk exposures
- 9) Have a flexible timeline to complete the effort.

The group then came up with a wish list of 50-plus requirements that they would like to see in the new design.

The group was motivated by an appreciation to those who came before us and gave us the opportunity to perform in our own building, and an obligation to those who will come after to give them something even better.

The first official meeting with BLDD will be July 26. A critical decision that Players will need to make early on is whether to build new or remodel. There are multiple pros and cons to each, of course. Next steps include the meeting with the architect and the formation of an official building committee. The end result will be an architectural plan that will be the cornerstone of a 5 to 7 year plan that will guide the Finance, Playreading, and Fundraising Committees. Keep your eyes and ears tuned as Community Players enters this exciting process.

Newest Member of the CP Family

Heather and Troy Williams welcomed their second child, Caden Quinn Williams, into the world on Saturday, June 3rd at 1:05 pm at OSF St. Joseph.

Rehearsal Pictures from *Beauty and the Beast*.

