

## **You can still catch “Beauty and the Beast” in El Paso**

by Mike Cook for the Las Cruces Sun-News, February 2017, unpublished

“Tale as old as time \ Song as old as rhyme \ Beauty and the Beast.”

Story told anew \ as only they could do \ Lucero and McQueen.

I didn’t think Scaffolding Theatre Company could top its previous productions of “Nine,” “Chicago” and “Passion.” But co-founders Megan McQueen and Justin Lucero may have done it with “Beauty and the Beast.”

If you didn’t get to see it this past weekend at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces or at New Mexico Tech in Socorro, you missed an incredible show. There are no more performances scheduled in Las Cruces, but, you can still catch it during one last performance in El Paso.

And, believe me, this show is worth the trip. It’s full of breath-taking moments and outstanding performances of such power and grace. As with all their shows, co-directors Lucero and McQueen find a way to bring out the best in each performer -- and every prop -- in this story within a story.

As much as anything during the evening, the shadow puppets that a couple of actors created during “Wolf Chase” and its reprise showed the genius of the directors. These were two brief moments that were so amazing in their simplicity and originality that they literally took my breath away.

The rose that marked the passage of time throughout the show was another brilliant touch, along with the dancing plates, the curtains as costumes, the books as castle doors.

The directors are past masters at misdirection and using the entire stage, because you never seem to see the actors picking up anything or changing costumes. They just seamlessly transform themselves and transport the audience into their magical world.

Rio Raggazone didn’t need any help to create a Beast that Walt Disney himself would have loved. He was so angry, so vulnerable, so human. But the addition of two other actors as part of his costume, to echo some of his words and to match his every movement was another brilliant stroke by Lucero and McQueen. It not only made him bigger and creepier, it created a beautiful moment when the Beast danced with Belle (Veronica Bissell).

You could feel the clock, the candelabra, the teapot and cup, the feather duster and the wardrobe aching to be “Human Again.” Their “Transformation” – as the Enchantress (Xodia Choate) restored them with her magic and her graceful movements and stunning voice – was so sweet.

I cried a little when Amanda Bradford (Mrs. Potts) sang the title song so beautifully, accompanied by Ginny May on piano, Dominic Lowhard on flute and Cesar Camarena on cello. Bradford's costume almost perfectly matched her teapot, and her entire performance was golden.

Every single one of the 10 actors in this show was outstanding. In some ways, the most impressive of all was 13-year-old Harmony Schlesinger, who played Chip and Lefou. To say she held her own with older and more experienced actors doesn't do her justice. I loved everything she did on stage.

Bissell was so sweet and strong as Belle, and she has such an incredible voice that filled the entire theatre.

No one could hold a candle to Algernon D'Amassa's Lumiere. His lead in "Be Our Guest" was truly one of the highlights of this show, and that's saying a great deal.

Cameron Lang's Cogsworth was charming and witty with a beautiful voice. Like D'Amassa with the candelabra, Bradford with the teapot and Schlesinger with the cup, I could not believe how much this amazing young man could do to bring a simple clock so incredibly to life.

Daniela Castorena was able to produce the same magic with her feather duster as Babette, and was also delightful as the baker. Like everyone else in this cast, I could hardly believe all she was able to bring to such very different characters.

The same can be said for Brianna Chavez Chacon as Madame de la Grande with her wardrobe. She was also just terrific in the cross-gender performance as Maurice, especially when she was paired with Bissell in "No Matter What."

Brandon Brown, who is simply a genius on stage in any role, saved some of the magic he created as the Scarecrow in Las Cruces Community Theatre's recent production of "Wizard of Oz," for his performance as Gaston.

Take a bus, steal a car, hop on a magic carpet – just find a way to get to El Paso or Socorro if you haven't seen this show. You will be very, very glad you did.

The musical is based on the animated Disney film celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year with a live-action remake. It includes music by Alan Menken, lyrics by Howard Ashman and Tim Rice, and a book by Linda Woolverton.

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## **BREAKOUT**

Two remaining performances of “Beauty and the Beast” are Feb. 11, 12 in El Paso

If you missed Scaffolding Theatre Company’s production of “Beauty and the Beast” in Las Cruces and Socorro, you still have two chances to see it in El Paso.

The show will be performed at 7 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 11 and at 2:30 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 12 at the Philanthropy Theatre, 125 Pioneer Plaza, in El Paso.

All tickets are \$16 for these two shows.

For reservations and additional information, visit [www.scaffoldingtheatrecompany.com](http://www.scaffoldingtheatrecompany.com), click on click on the word “here” under ticket information, and then click on “buy tickets here” under El Paso.

For more information, visit [www.scaffoldingtheatrecompany.com](http://www.scaffoldingtheatrecompany.com). You can also find them on Facebook at Scaffolding Theatre Company.

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