

# Disney's 'Beast' is instant classic

Believe what you've heard, "Beauty and the Beast," the new Walt Disney animated feature, is every bit as good — maybe better — than the 60 years of cartoons that preceded it.

We all know the story. Here, it's introduced to us in a series of stained glass windows, a new twist on the storybook pages that used to open Disney films.

A wicked spell, we discover, has turned a handsome prince into the hairy Beast, who rattles around a dreary Gothic castle in a perpetually rotten mood. Unless someone falls in love with him before his 21st birthday, the Beast will die.

When an old man stumbles upon his castle, the Beast imprisons him in the tower. The man's daughter, who comes looking for him, promises to stay with the Beast forever as long as her father is set free.

Where sappy music often got in the way of a good Disney yarn, the six new songs by Howard Ashman and Alan Menken both advance the story and work as hummable, memorable moments by themselves.

Belle, a beauty and a bookworm, delivers a yearning song that both establishes her character and sets her at odds with the townspeople who consider her an oddball.

**GASTON LEADS** the pack. He's a strapping brute, completely full of himself, who wants Belle to marry him and will stop at nothing to see that she does. When he discovers that Belle may actually have feelings for the Beast, he sets off to mount the creature's head on his wall.

Disney employed some 525 animators on this project, headed by a pair of young directors, Kirk Wise, 27, and Gary Trousdale, 30. Although

the pace has been quickened slightly to appeal to modern audiences, the film could easily have been made 30 years ago and looked virtually the same.

The opening shot dollies in on a castle in the distance. The trees we pass along the way take on an almost three-dimensional quality, a testament to the multi-plane camera that has given Disney cartoons an added dash of realism since the 1940s.

This three-dimensional quality also translates to the lead characters, who have a greater emotional depth than the Barbie doll Cinderella and Ken-style princes that came before them. By the end of the film, the adult audience is brought to real tears because the characters are so believable.

"Beauty and the Beast" is not all love and mushy stuff, as kids will be glad to discover. Gaston regularly abuses his pint-sized sidekick Three Stooges-style while a trio of animated household objects serve basically the same comic and choral purpose as the fish, bird and crab in "The Little Mermaid."

**THE CLOCK**, teapot, and candelabra provide the film's liveliest number. "Be Our Guest" spoofs Busby Berkeley musical numbers, with swimming spoons creating geometric patterns in a soup bowl. Later

tickets please

**John Monaghan**

they must protect the castle from invaders, eliciting the loudest squeals from a mesmerized kid audience.

The animation remains clean and simple, with one noticeable stab at experimentation. When Belle and the

Beast have a climactic dance in a sweeping fairytale ballroom, the cartoon image is melded with film of an actual French castle. The effect is surprising and enchanting.

With this and the previous "Little Mermaid," Disney is entering a new golden age of animated films. The tragic AIDS-related death of lyricist Howard Ashman has put the only damper on "Beauty and the Beast," which should break box office records during the holidays while joining the ranks of Disney's best-loved films.



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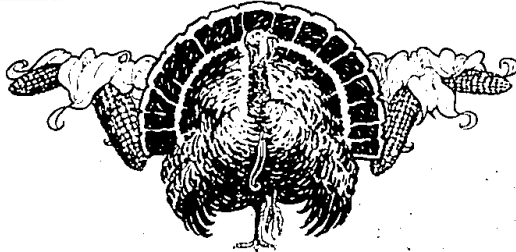
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