

Disney's Beauty and the Beast
Production Notes
By Rob Ghormley, Director, North Crawford Playhouse
608-735-4311, info@northcrawfordplayhouse1.org

The transformation

We cast actor A as the beast and actor B as the beast stunt double.

We dramatized the prologue as a series of freeze silhouettes of prince and enchantress, each freeze separated by a three second bump blackout. A is dressed as the prince, B as the beast. We had A, the prince, freeze in a begging position directly over an open trap door. B, the beast, was inside the trap. During the three second blackout, A and B swapped places. This worked well, especially since we had a strong backlight on the figures, which left the audience a bit blinded.

During the opening village scenes, B gives the beast costume to A. A plays all scenes until Belle is released to go find her father. During the riot scene, A dresses as the prince, B as the beast. B plays the battle and kills Gaston, etc, speaking the few lines in a good imitation of A's voice.

In the actual transformation, we had the final rose petal drop, a clap of soft thunder and the enchantress walked back in beside the rose and we lit her with the bright rose light. All else went black. This drew the audience attention far away from the transformation, as our rose and enchantress were on a high platform in front of the right proscenium. We also shot low-lying fog over the dead beast and Belle. So under cover of fog, and distraction, A and B swapped places. At the right point in the music and as all the pyro, smoke, mirror ball, bells and whistles were going off, A, the prince, stood up, rising slowly out of the fog as a strong down light faded up from directly overhead. Voila, the prince. "Oo ah, how did they do that?" Worked for us anyway.

The magic rose:

We mounted the red felt rose on a high platform with a screen behind to hide the petal drop operator. We made three different rose heads: a full rose as big as a cabbage, a half wilted rose, and the empty leafless head for the end. We made two large felt rose petals, which connect to any of the rose heads by magnets, with black tie lines running back to the operator. Pull the string slowly and the rose petal appears to tremble, wrinkle, then peel off and drop to the table below. We accompanied this effect with a brilliant shaft of light on the rose and a soft roll of thunder just as the rose released from the head. After the second petal is dropped, the operator, during a point in the play when the audience is distracted by other action, reaches from behind the screen, changes the rose head and reconnects the same two petals to the new head. We even reconnected a petal to the same head once, which allowed us to drop a total of 7 petals in the show. The full head and first two petals dropped in the opening narrative. We changed to the wilted head for act one and dropped three at various times, Act II we put up the empty head and dropped two, which, of course, emptied the head and ended the magic spell.

Human Furniture (besides main characters)

By making all the furniture in the castle to be human, many students get a lot of stage time. It

was a scream to see a room full of strange characters milling about stage until Belle knocked on the castle door and suddenly everyone dove for their assigned positions and the room suddenly was a silent, dusty room full of furniture. The audience howled every night.

Tables - We had a dining table and two coffee tables. These table tops were strapped like a back pack on students dressed in black. The table legs were all hinged in the same direction, so, when standing, the legs hung down, out of the way. When the student bent over, the legs dropped solidly to table position and the student stabilized the legs from below. A full course meal was placed on the dining table, etc. A permanent floor length tablecloth covered the student when down and looked like a cape when standing. In *Be Our Guest*, the dining table danced in, bent down and held the meal center stage while the coffee tables danced. In other scenes the coffee tables dove to their positions and another actor would place a table setting on top, and then remove it again so the tables could get up.

Wing chairs - We had three delightful wing chairs two for the table and the Master's chair. These were strapped like two-legged backpacks to students dressed in matching upholstery fabric. The chair backs were so overstuffed that the wearer receded into the stuffing. The wearer sat down upon the two rear legs of the backpack, causing the wearers own two feet to form the two front legs of the chair and the wearers lap to form the seat, and the wearer's arms to be the chair arms. The lap was covered by an upholstered lap desk, skirted to floor length., which served as the seat for the major characters to actually sit on. When standing, skirting looked like a dress. So the Belle sat on the chair for "*Be Our Guest*" and then the chair stood up and danced with her. One chair whirled Belle into the lap of another chair in "dip" fashion and that chair rose and danced her around too. Funny gag.

Sofa - The most hilarious of all the pieces is a camelback, upholstered sofa, which seats three comfortably, yet is a costume for a stout actor. The sofa seat is strapped like a backpack to the student who lays prostrate on the floor beneath it. The short sofa legs support the weight of people sitting on it. But the sofa frame is hinged as to allow the wearer to bend up at the middle and stand and dance around, serve coffee, etc. For example, in the library scene, Belle is wanting to sit down to read to the Beast. Lumiere whistles for the sofa, who comes racing in and dives for the floor right behind the Beast and Belle. They sit calmly as though the sofa had been there all along. Good gag. The audience couldn't say enough about the sofa.

Gargoyles - We made a huge stone fireplace with two human gargoyles of the same color, which sat in niches on either side with their wings folded. When the Beast ordered, they hopped up and grabbed Maurice or Belle or Gaston as needed. At the end of the play, we had the gargoyles drag the stabbed Gaston down into the fiery dungeon, instead of falling off a cliff.

Other human pieces we made include:

Suit of armor - black mask on wearer makes the armor appear empty

Full length dressing mirror

3 potted plants

Footstool

Hat stand

2 candelabras.

Broom

Maurice's Contraption -

Our simple wooden framed machine was built onto the frame of a child's bicycle big enough for your Maurice to pedal safely, but the smaller the better. The contraption is littered with little battery powered Lego motors, which spin pinwheels and silly piñatas and streamers and cheap carnival crap

on springs. These motors are joined to one power switch. As Maurice enters on the bike all these are spinning. A tiny table unfolds over the bike seat to form a flat platform on which Belle positions the pre-cut log. The ax, gravity driven, is held vertical by a latch, which is connected by a string to a battery powered wheel which slowly and silently winds the string until the latch releases and the ax falls. This winder is on a separate switch from all the other motors. To test the machine Maurice turns on both switches and stands back in terrified doubt as to whether it will go off. The piano plays the contraption music as the winder slowly lifts the latch, the ax drops through the pre cut log which falls in half to the floor and the audience laughs and applauds appreciatively at Maurice's and Belle's relief and delight. I'll send drawings if you desire.

Hope this is of some help.

Yours,

Rob Ghormley, Director North Crawford Playhouse
608-735-4311, info@northcrawfordplayhouse.org