

WITHAM OPERATIC WORKSHOP

Beauty and the Beast the Broadway musical, Book by Linda Woolverton, music by Alan Menken . and lyrics by Howard Ashman and Tim Rice.

Director Nikki Mundell-Poole

Musical Director Emma Firth

Assistant to the Director Charlotte Watling

Performed at The Witham Public Hall on Wednesday 18thFebruary 2026 at 7.30pm

I was warmly welcomed on arrival by Front House Manager Debbie Rolph and had a discussion after the performance with Director Nikki Mundell-Poole.

The large auditorium was near to capacity with a very supportive audience and a real buzz amongst the crowd.

The clever set was minimal but incredibly effective comprising a backdrop which denoted the castle walls with arched windows. Set in the middle was a large video screen showing a book whose pages opened out to show each scene change.

Creative use was made of projection and the projected scenes were very bright and colourful. Good use was made of the front stage curtains. There were a few props moved fluently and a marvellous' invention'! I overheard a discussion during the interval as to whether this was a washing machine but no conclusion was reached!The costumes were dazzling as were the many wigs. All the outfits were relevant to character and often in matching sets. Very attractive! Sound levels were good with all actors heard clearly and the roar of the Beast was the main sound effect.

Lighting effects enhanced the scenes and there were some impressive visuals.

The 11 piece orchestra was ably directed by talented Musical Director Emma Firth who clearly provided excellent support to the cast in delivering complex harmonies effectively.

The cast were never still on stage, using every inch of space and the choreography was first class. I admired the choral effect in one sequence. There was so much energy demonstrated on stage and all the cast were enthusiastic with plenty of smiling faces evident. This was a spectacular and fast moving performance from this young and very talented cast.

There was plenty for the large ensemble of townspeople and castle staff to do and their vocals and movement were exemplary and a joy to watch. Whilst all cast members should be proud of their role in this well cast production there are some stellar principal roles that I must mention.

Belle was well played by Georgina Warren who had a lovely clear and sparkling voice. I particularly enjoyed her vocals in 'Home' and 'A Change In Me'. Frank Thornton, as The Beast had a rich and commanding voice and played this role initially fiercely and aggressively whilst showing a more gentle and loving manner when wooing Belle. Frank effected this 'transformation' very well. I especially enjoyed his singing of 'If I Can't Love Her.'

Sam Howard was a most arrogant and self important Gaston, who was brilliantly characterised by Sam. His sidekick Max Midgely as LeFou was very agile, naughty and cheeky. They were well paired in the song 'Gaston'. Mrs Potts (teapot) was ably played by Madison O'Grady with Lucy Goodman as Chip (cup). I was left wondering how Madison managed her costume for all the time on stage and I concluded 'with difficulty and practice'! She sang the title tune, 'Beauty and The Beast' tenderly and with feeling. Luc Roberts was an enlightening Lumiere, tall and agile with good vocals. Again his costume was somewhat restraining but he carried it well. There were a number of smaller roles, too many to mention individually but all intrinsic to the plot and all well characterised by the actors. Many congratulations to Director Nikki Mundell-Poole, assisted by Charlotte Watling, for her creativity and ability to encourage this cast to achieve such success. This was an incredibly good performance from everyone involved in any way. The audience thoroughly enjoyed the evening, as did I.

**Hazel Hole MBE
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