



A guide to the sensory-friendly performance of **Beauty and the Beast**

Estimated Running time: 53 minutes

About the Show

Beauty and the Beast is a live theatrical production performed for an audience. The audience includes boys and girls, moms and dads, and other grown-ups, like grandparents, teachers, family, and friends. All of them have come for the same reason—to enjoy the show!

Based on the classic fairy tale, the story of *Beauty and the Beast* is told using puppets. The puppets are made to move and vocalize by specially trained actors called puppeteers. The five puppeteers for this show each perform many puppets. They will introduce themselves before the play starts to show you how the puppets work.



The Story

This production of *Beauty and the Beast* presents the well-known tale of love and acceptance in a new way. Initially, the action takes place in an alley behind a city building where a book, among other things, has been thrown away. A cat reads the book to two mice, and the story of Beauty and how she comes to know the Beast comes alive. There's a good deal of action and slapstick humor throughout, mixed with suspense, mystery, and music.

While the cat and mice are traditional hand and rod puppets, the main characters, including Beauty, her mother, and the Beast are "found object" puppets. This means they are made up of everyday objects that have intended uses other than puppetry. In this case, these puppets are made of items that have been left near the garbage can in the alley. For example, Beauty is made of a mop, an old umbrella, and a discarded shirt. These puppets look unusual, but as they walk and talk, they become endearing characters.

When Beauty's mother, and later Beauty herself, go to the Beast's castle, they encounter many traditionally inanimate possessions of the Beast's that talk, sing, dance, and try to make their guests feel at home. Among them are roses, a tree, furniture, lanterns, a book, musical instruments, lawn décor, and a fireplace screen that flaps and flies. Mother and daughter each also meet the Beast, a large, tragic being with antlers and a loud roar, who longs to be loved, and to have his spell of loneliness broken. While he can be fun, wildly trying to play guitar and sing or talking sweetly to his roses, he is still a beast who howls and grumbles.

The Production

A live theatre performance usually has special lighting, sound effects, music, sets, costumes, and props that help tell the story. Here are a few examples of stagecraft you might want to note in advance. For this play, there is the sound of an old-time steam work whistle that blows loudly multiple times. Clothing caught in a strong wind dances through the air and on to a clothesline. The music is mostly upbeat, including a fun rap, but there is also some slightly spooky music to enhance the mysterious mood of the Beast and his castle. The back of the stage is kept dark to hide the puppeteers who dress in black so they can be on the stage the entire time without being seen. There is a lightning and thunder storm that heralds the appearance of the villainess, the Beast's sister. There's a special TV screen that allows characters far away to communicate with the castle. And as noted above, many objects that don't usually move, do.

The Experience

In most theaters, the audience sits quietly in the dark, sometimes right next to someone, and they usually stay seated. While they may clap or laugh, they usually don't talk except in whispers. This is nice because it doesn't interfere with the other audience members or the performers. For this performance, you will have some extra sitting space for wiggle room, and if you want to make sounds, get up and walk around, or to go to a quiet place outside the theater, that's okay! Fidget toys, headphones, and sunglasses are available, if you'd like them. The house lights won't dim completely so it won't be totally dark in the audience during the performance. Although not usually the case, for this performance you can eat a snack quietly, if you've brought one. If you need anything to make your time in the theater more comfortable, just ask a staff member wearing a Center for Puppetry Arts badge for help.

As always, we welcome questions, comments and suggestions!