

"Home should be where the heart is." - Belle

The earliest recorded mention of a musical performed at Cumberland Valley High School was during the fall of the 1963-1964 school year. The musical, *The Fantasticks*, which premiered Off-Broadway in 1960, later found its way to the Cumberland Valley stage in 1963 when the junior and senior plays merged for the first time. Photographs uncovered in the CVHS IMC Argus archives show the production's emulation of the Off-Broadway design: a ladder and some chairs.

60 years later, the Cumberland Valley High School Musical celebrates its diamond jubilee with *Beauty and the Beast*. This year, the talented scenic artists and carpenters have remounted Stanley A. Meyer's design from the original 1994 Broadway production—a long way from the simple ladder and chairs used in *The Fantasticks* in 1963.

Beauty, the stage adaptation of Walt Disney Studio's 1991 Academy Award winning film was Disney Theatrical Production's first Broadway venture. The film's score, written by Broadway veterans Alan Menken and Howard Ashman, was praised by *New York Times* critic Frank Rich as "the best Broadway score of 1991". Only, the score wasn't on Broadway—yet. Then Disney CEO Michael Eisner was encouraged by Rich's high praise and made the move to bring the Mouse to the Great White Way.

First opening in April 1994 at the Palace Theatre, *Beauty* later moved to the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre in 1999. *Beauty* enjoyed a 13-year run, closing in July 2007 after 5,461 performances. It was in 2006 that Cumberland Valley produced *Beauty and the Beast* for the first time. 17 years later, *Beauty* makes her return.

The legacy of *Beauty* cannot be understated. *Beauty*, alongside Disney's 1997 stage adaptation of *The Lion King* (1994), cemented the Mouse's place on Broadway. Regional, community, and high school theaters program *Beauty* as part of their season on a consistent basis. The question asks itself: what is it about this musical that has made it a cultural warhorse?

Is it the musical's message of the redemptive power of love? Belle learns to look past the Beast's ghastly features and love the man within. We follow her journey, rooting for her. Perhaps it is how the musical portrays gross intolerance in order to show its many dangers. Let us not forget that the mob incited by Gaston to attack the castle does so with the war cry: "we don't like what we don't understand."

It might also be the question of home: is it a place or an idea? Belle sings the epigraph that began this essay: "home should be where the heart is." For 60 years, the Cumberland Valley High School Musical has been much more than an after-school theatre program. It has served as a haven for students from all walks of life to come together—on stage, in the pit, or backstage—and celebrate the transformative power of musical theatre.

That power is proven by the number of alumni that return every year to be a part of the magic and help each new generation experience it themselves. And you—the audience—get to bear witness to it all.

This year, Cumberland Valley invites you to "be our guest" as we welcome you home. Our home.

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