

Film Review: Beauty and the Beast****

Beauty and the Beast

Direction: Bill Condon

Screenplay: Stephen Chbosky, Evan Spiliotopoulos

Cast: Dan Stevens, Emma Watson, Kevin Kline, Luke Evans, Josh Gad,

Ian McKellen, Ewan McGregor, Emma Thompson, Audra McDonald, Stanley Tucci

Length: 129 minutes

Rating: PG



Just over 25 years ago, the animated film 'Beauty and the Beast' was released to universal critical and audience acclaim and broke box office records for animation. It became the first animated film to win the Golden Globe Award for Best Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy and the first animated film to be nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture.

As the 30th release in the Walt Disney Animation Studios filmography, the 1991 film grossed almost \$425 million on a \$25 million budget and went on to win two Oscars, three Golden Globes and five Grammys overall. 'Beauty and the Beast' was also the first Disney animated film to be adapted for the Broadway stages where the Tony winning production accumulated \$1.4 billion after playing to live audiences for over 13 years and almost 5,500 performances.

But it is the original motion picture masterpiece, a landmark of cinema that changed the game for animated filmmaking, that has cast the largest legacy by remaining popular with audiences for the past quarter century. As you can imagine, the new live action film 'Beauty and the Beast' faces an

almost impossible challenge. Based on the 1991 film which was adapted from the French fairy tale of the same name by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont and used again as source material here, the 2017 film does indeed rise to the challenge.

Central to the story is Belle (Watson), a beautiful young lady who lives alone with her eccentric inventor father Maurice (Kline) as an outcast in her little town. She is pursued obsessively for marriage by self-obsessed hunter Gaston (Evans) who in turn is followed by colourful subordinate LeFou (Gad). When Maurice goes missing, Belle is able to escape the confines of the quiet village and arrives at an almighty castle where she finds him a prisoner of a monster. In order to save Maurice, Belle surrenders her freedom to the great Beast (Stevens), imprisoning herself in an enchanted castle.

Once a prince cursed by an enchantress as punishment for his cruelty and wickedness, the Beast has been held captive in his own home ever since his transformation. All the inhabitants of the castle have been turned into household objects: Lumière (McGregor), once bouteiller now candelabra; Cogsworth (McKellen), a mantel clock majordomo; Mrs. Potts (Thompson), head housekeeper now teapot; Madame de Garderobe (McDonald), a wardrobe opera singer and Maestro Cadenza (Tucci), once court composer but now harpsichord, serve their beastly master in a dark fortress.

Only true love can break the spell, freeing the Beast and castle life from the curse and returning them all back to their human state. A magical mirror allows the Beast to view the world outside while a single rose determines the time remaining. But after a decade of incarceration, time is running out. Once the last rose petal falls, the curse stands forever.

Director Bill Condon returns to familiar musicals territory with 'Beauty and the Beast', having already scripted 'Chicago'

and directed 'Dreamgirls', receiving an Oscar nomination for the former. Benefitting greatly from his experience, this huge film is kept on course while its story and characters are presented with more gravity and explanation, courtesy of its screenwriters. Similarly to previous Disney animated films to receive live action adaptations; 'Cinderella' by Kenneth Branagh in 2015 and 'The Jungle Book' by Jon Favreau in 2016, 'Beauty and the Beast' follows the proven formula for success and wisely remains faithful to the original story of its older relative at its foundations.

Special visual effects enhance the glowing cinematography while live action with digital rendering allows the actors to bring the hand drawn characters into real life and furthest away from animation as possible. Watson infuses Belle with the more human characteristics of improvisation through speech and movement while Stevens provides the Beast with extensive facial expressions with help from the latest motion capture technology.

Composer Alan Menken and the late lyricist Howard Ashman won Academy Awards for Best Original Score and Song for the 1991 film. Menken returns to solely score the music for the 2017 film including an absolutely spectacular rendition of 'Be Our Guest' and a breathtakingly emotional presentation of 'Evermore', one of four new compositions arranged especially for this live action creation.

Within only one week of release, 'Beauty and the Beast' has earned more than \$450 million at the box office worldwide. While waltzing past its predecessor commercially, the 2017 film still has a long way to go to match the budget/box office ratio of the 1991 film. With a combined production and marketing budget of \$300 million, it would need to make at least \$5.1 billion. Unfortunately, that is almost certainly impossible.

'Beauty and the Beast' comprises majestic camera operation

through ornate baroque sets, updates beloved source material with enough nostalgic experience and features incredible musical performances including a hilltop reprise that Maria Von Trapp would be proud of.

Obviously, it cannot compete with the original work of art but can honourably accompany it to form a successful partnership. A tale as old as time? Only time will tell.

'Beauty and the Beast' is in cinemas now.