

Beauty and the Beast



Beauty

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Flat Rock Playhouse's production of 'Disney's Beauty and the Beast' uses a team of experts to create the costumes

By Amy McCraw

Times-News Correspondent

Bridget Bartlett holds the measuring tape hanging from her neck against a few inches of gold-colored fabric spread across a large table. She grabs a pair of scissors with her free hand and cuts where she has just measured.

With the snap of her scissors, Bartlett begins another costume for the Flat Rock Playhouse's production of *Disney's Beauty and the Beast*, which opens Wednesday and runs through July 25.

The gold ball gown Bartlett began measuring and cutting recently will become one of about 75 costumes made from scratch this summer at the Playhouse for its production of *Beauty and the Beast*.

When it opens, audiences "should expect a fairy tale that appeals to all ages," Bartlett said. Bartlett has been the costume designer at the Playhouse for 20 years, and she normally designs Playhouse costumes alone.

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Plot, times and tickets for 'Beauty and the Beast.' **SE**

But creating costumes for a fairy tale that includes a teapot who steams, a candlestick who lights up and a wardrobe who opens led Bartlett to call in reinforcements this time.

She asked Janet Gray, an assistant professor at Winthrop University, to co-design costumes for *Beauty and the Beast*. Gray has worked in the costume shop at Flat Rock for three seasons.

"I really needed somebody on the same wave length," Bartlett said. "I just sort of looked at her over dinner and



CHRIS CLEVENBERG/TIMES-NEWS

Melisia Mabry, a costume coordinator, models the costume for Mrs. Potts that will be used in the Flat Rock Playhouse production of *Beauty and the Beast*.

said, "You will co-design this."

Lisa Amee Sturz, a puppeteer who has worked for network television, Walt Disney, the Ice Capades and the Lyric Opera of Chicago, was called in to create fabricated foam costumes to bring the teapot, wardrobe, candlestick and other objects to life. Two volunteers, Christine Perry and Pat Klitenick, are also helping stitch and sew the many costumes.

Perry and Klitenick work with Bartlett at a theater in Ocala, Fla., in the



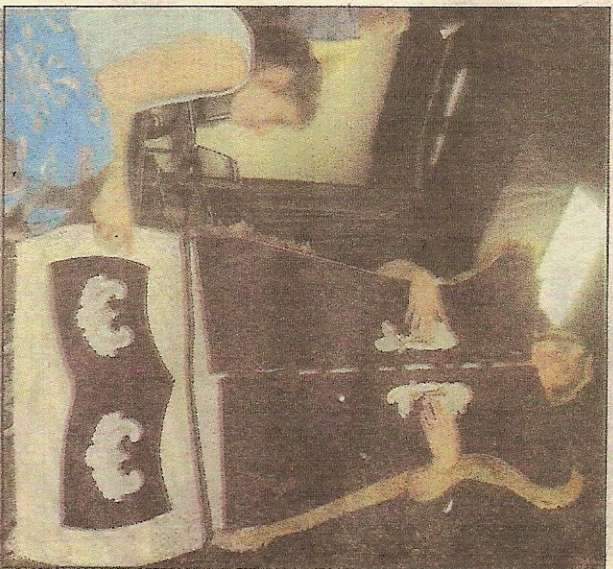
PATRICK SULLIVAN/TIMES-NEWS

winter and came with her to Flat Rock this summer to help. Klitenick's father, retired rocket scientist Gene Moore, also got involved in the project. He helped the costumers find a way to make Lumiere's candles light up and make the teapot steam. Moore also helped create a whacky scientist hat for one character.

"On this show, we knew we had to bring people in," Bartlett said. "We don't want any negativity happening in the room. We have a good sense of humor."

First in line

Beauty and the Beast became available for theaters like Flat Rock this



PATRICK SULLIVAN/TIMES-NEWS

Lisa Sturz, left, works with Betsy Bisson as they create Bisson's costume, complete with drawers and doors, for the upcoming musical *Beauty and the Beast*.

Costume

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year and the Playhouse was one of the first in line to produce the show. But Disney told theaters they could not produce the Broadway musical and must limit their reproduction of the tale to the animated movie version.

That meant costumes for the production are not available to be rented or borrowed from another theater.

"Right now if you want to do the show, you have to build it. Right now it doesn't exist beyond Broadway," Gray said.

Building *Beauty and the Beast* from the ground up has left little room for anything else at the Playhouse costume shop. Dozens of villager costumes hang in dressing rooms while the foam teapot, creamer and clock sit in another room waiting to be covered in the fabric that will bring them to life. Sewing machines buzz constantly.

Gray, Bartlett and the others have been working 14-hour days seven days a week for the last several weeks to make all the costumes for the show. Perry spent hours one day sewing 67 yards of ruffle for one outfit.

Sturz spent three weeks working on the wardrobe costume. "The reason it is so complicated is the drawers and doors that open and close and you have to



Actor Scott Treadway, who plays Cogsworth, and Malisia Mabry, a costume coordinator, clown around during a costume fitting for *Beauty and the Beast*.

CHRIS CLEVELAND/TIMES-NEWS

put a person in it," she said.

The wardrobe, teapot, clock, candlestick and other object characters are made from specialty foam ordered from California, she said. Sturz, who has been based in Fairview for the last eight years, said she begins each costume with a two-dimensional pattern. From that pattern and some geometry, Sturz then creates a three-dimensional foam costume with straps that allow an actor to wear the costume.

Sturz also had to take the size of the theater into account when designing some of the foam creations. The teapot narrowly fits

down a backstage hallway.

"I've been definitely pulling some late-nighters," she said. "The costumes are beautiful and they are unique."

The chance to design costumes for Flat Rock has been worth the late nights and hard work, Sturz said.

"One of the things I love about it is working with Bridget and Janet and working with people on that high level professionally," she said. "I had so much fun with them choosing fabrics. The people at Flat Rock have been so welcoming and wonderful."



MICHAEL JUSTUS/TIMES-NEWS

Scott Treadway wears his Cogsworth character costume as Christine Perry, stitcher, checks the fit of the costume.

Coordinating costumes with light

Once the foam costumes are finished, Gray and Bartlett will cover them in fabric selected for each character. Some costumes, including the candlestick, will require the costume designers to coordinate their work with the theater's lighting department to make the characters come to life.

The costumes in *Beauty and the Beast* are an important part of each character in the play, Gray said.

"Costumes are essential to creating the story. Without what we do to make them turn into these characters... they don't have what they need to be a character," she said.

Bartlett said she also does not want to disappoint Flat Rock audiences that may have seen the play on Broadway or watched the cartoon version of the story.

"We want people to think they are seeing the whole show," she said. Bartlett said she wants to improve the costumes when possible and make them easier for actors to wear while keeping them true to what audiences may have seen on Broadway.

Once Flat Rock finishes with its production, Bartlett said some of the costumes may become available for other theaters to rent.

Scissors in hand, Bartlett takes another whack at the gold cloth as she, Gray and the volunteers continue to work on the ball gown. They only have about 35 more costumes and a few more late nights before the show opens.