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## Peter Pan Foundation production of 'Beauty and the Beast' opens Dec. 2

By Ashley Dong



Photo Ashley Dong

Singing teapots, nosy townspeople, and dancing silverware will come to life through the performers of the Peter Pan Foundation (PPF) this winter. On Dec. 2, 9, and 10, the Lafayette-based nonprofit will proudly present "Beauty and the Beast."

In this classic Disney movie-turned-musical, an enchantress curses a young, arrogant prince into the body of a hideous Beast. To teach him a lesson, the spell cannot be broken until the Beast learns to love another and earns her love in return, and until then, he is forced to live alone in his castle. Meanwhile, in a nearby village, Belle, a spirited, sharp-witted girl longs for a life beyond what the townspeople have in mind for her. When her father is taken prisoner by the Beast, Belle bravely takes her papa's place. Together, in the enchanted castle, both Beauty and the Beast finally discover what they are looking for.

"I suggested 'Beauty and the Beast' for our winter show because it has a beautiful message and is such a wonderful, family-oriented, feel-good musical," Rehearsal Manager Kirsten Torkildson said.

This year, there are three casts of performers of all backgrounds and ages - the youngest performer is 5 years old; the oldest is 46 - and the show is directed by PPF's founder, Leslie Noel Hansen. In addition to the

three full-length shows, there will be an In-Concert Performance featuring the powerful voices of PPF's adult performers on Dec. 2 at 5 p.m.

"Our talented performers are putting their all into the characters, and I am confident that this performance will be nothing short of beautiful," Production Assistant Larrolyn Patterson Parms-Ford said.

All four performances will take place at the PPF home. Although unaffiliated, PPF shares its rehearsal and performance space with Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Lafayette, in a building not originally designed for theater. However, Leslie uses this unconventional space to her advantage.

"PPF is very fortunate to have Leslie as a director because her vision and the magic she can create in unique spaces is amazing. Our set-up makes the show more special because it pulls the audience right into the story, so they feel like they're a part of the magic," Torkildson said.

With every musical, song, and interaction, the performers of PPF bring a spirit of philanthropy. "The heart of the PPF is about giving back to those in need. We are dedicated to forever finding ways to always be the most loving, inclusive, inspiring safe space we can be," PPF's website states.

The organization especially focuses its efforts on the UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital in Oakland. The proceeds of its annual benefit musical, "Wish Upon a Star," are donated to the children's hospital, and over the years, PPF has raised over \$200,000 for its cause. Additionally, throughout the year, PPF organizes visits to the Oakland hospital. Dressed up as beloved Disney characters, performers have the opportunity to interact directly with the patients. Through one of these visits, PPF met one of its own performers.

In 2018, Benny Williams, now 16, was a patient at the Day Hospital at UCSF Benioff. During one of PPF's visits to the hospital, he met Leslie, dressed as Elsa from "Frozen."

"This interaction raised my spirits while I was in the hospital. I later joined PPF because I wanted to help the other kids in the hospital who were in my situation. PPF has given me a safe place to be myself," Williams said. This December, Williams will play Cogsworth in "Beauty and the Beast."

Like Williams, many performers have found a home within the organization. Miramonte senior Janie Hollerbach is now in her 10th year with PPF. "Being a performer in PPF has taught me the importance of valuing the arts and maintaining connections with close friends. I have met so many people through the Peter Pan Foundation, and I love how this organization strongly emphasizes the importance of

representation and inclusion," Hollerbach, who is playing Babette in the winter show, said.

The Peter Pan Foundation brings its magical touch to everything it does. "The heart and passion that our performers bring to their performances is really special, and I believe audiences will walk away knowing that they just experienced something incredible," Torkildson said.

The writer of this article is a member of the "Beauty and the Beast" cast. Read more about PPF's story at <https://peterpanfoundation.org>. Buy tickets at [www.showtix4u.com/events/18708](http://www.showtix4u.com/events/18708).

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