

“If you read this script, and the actual lines, there is so much more relevant turmoil in this show than I could have ever imagined,” she said. “That’s why I hopped on board so strongly.”

Stage manager Kristen Gadzik agreed the stage production is markedly different from the 1991 animated film, with which many people are familiar and likely to associate the story. The characters are the same, but there are additional songs — several eloquent and thought-provoking pieces that focus on characters’ development — and the themes are more obvious in the stage production, Gadzik said.

One example is the “Mob Song,” when Gaston galvanizes the French townsfolk to kill the beast, with lyrics such as, “We don’t like what we don’t understand, in fact it scares us, and this monster is mysterious at least.” A mob mentality grows. Terrified by Gaston’s description of the Beast, the crowd is convinced of its own self-righteousness, by virtue of being the majority. Flood believes the song was particularly relevant.

“I feel like we have a lot of segregation because we don’t understand other people,” she said.

She also finds it interesting to analyze the character of Gaston — who makes derisive and marginalizing comments about women throughout the show — in light of the #MeToo movement.

### Fresh takes on old roles

From the get-go, Flood and Gadzik encouraged the cast — composed of nearly 30 actors, elementary-aged to elderly — to disregard how the characters are portrayed in the animated film and to discover their own motivations and depictions, rather than imitations.

“All I care about is what is in the script and how it makes you feel,” Flood told her cast.

Gadzik thought it would be difficult for the cast to separate their ideas about the Broadway musical from the animated version, but the actors embraced it. Ensemble members constructed backstories for their characters to add depth and convey the show’s themes to the audience. The leads, too, are approaching their roles with fresh eyes.

“Everyone’s been really receptive to how the story is actually very different in the Broadway version,” Gadzik said.

Flood agreed, adding they have two women playing the part of Belle, and “they like that I don’t want them to play just the typical Disney princess.”



A dance routine from ‘Beauty and the Beast’

PHOTOS BY COLIN MURPHEY



Natasha Beals, left, and Lindsay St. Clair take the stage during a rehearsal.

Both actors playing Belle, like most of the cast, are relatively new to the stage, or at least the Peninsula Association of Performing Artists.

Flood — who assistant directed “She Loves Me” last summer alongside veteran director Barbara Poulshock before taking on the head director role this summer — was surprised how “people came out of the woodwork” for “Beauty and the Beast” auditions.

“It’s fun to see so many people who are learning so much and taking so much in stride,” she said.

### Coming to fruition

With the infusion of fresh blood, Flood sees potential for the association to do a greater quantity and diversity of shows and events in the coming years. The group focuses on presenting a summer musical, a fundraiser for the local

American Legion chapter, and various workshops.

“Beauty and the Beast” presents a refreshing blend, not only of theater newcomers and return participants, but of age groups and other demographics.

This environment, a hallmark of community theater, benefits everyone involved by providing an opportunity for them to “socialize and get out of their own comfort zone and peer group,” Gadzik said. It also motivates the theater regulars to reevaluate old traditions and practices that are taken for granted to make sure they’re still relevant.

Both Gadzik and Flood are happy to stage a musical showcasing the talents of several people from the community.

“There are a bunch of people on the Peninsula who are artistic who don’t have the opportunity to be creative and be onstage,” Gadzik said. “Being able to promote that on the back end is incredible.”

As opening night approaches, she said, “I am getting excited to see all this hard work we’ve been putting into the show come to fruition.” 