



## Entertainment :: Theatre

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### The Little Mermaid

by Robin Kavanagh  
EDGE Contributor  
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"Whoa." That's all my 8-year-old could say when the curtain closed on Disney's **The Little Mermaid**. She was captivated and mesmerized for nearly two-and-a-half hours (not to mention a little taken with the kid who played Flounder) with the stage rendering of a story that has had her heart since she was a toddler.



Sierra Boggess in "The Little Mermaid."

It's the story of a mermaid who falls for a handsome, human prince and sells her voice to an evil witch for a chance to win his heart. But more than that, it's also the story of the struggle between fathers and daughters as they grow, and following your heart, even if it leads you to where the rest of the crowd wouldn't dare go. Now blend all of that with the magic of Disney and Broadway, and you have yourself a spectacular evening ahead.

It's called "Broadway's sparkling new musical." And boy, does it ever shine. The Little Mermaid is one of the most vibrant and alive shows I've seen on Broadway since "The Boy from Oz." This dazzling adaptation of the cartoon film Disney brought to life back when I was a kid really surprised me, not only in its ability to resonate just as well (if not better) on stage, but also for the life the cast brought to some originally flat characters.

While the lead roles of Ariel and Prince Eric are played by relative newcomers, both Sierra Boggess and Sean Palmer both are flexing their chops and delivering Broadway-worthy performances. Boggess brings the sweet (and sometimes annoyingly naive) innocence of Ariel to life on stage with a voice that seemed created for Disney. Palmer also brings to the stage the handsome and courtly air one would expect from a prince, drawing breath from more than one audience member. While do think the chemistry between these two could be stronger, I think that also plays into the innocent nature of the characters, who find love based on innate attraction that has nothing to do with reality.

It's the more seasoned performers, however, that made this show stand out for me. Simply said, Sherie Rene Scott (Ursula) stole the show with her sassy and sexy Sea Witch. Her voice held such timbre and power, it easily rivals any of the great actresses of Broadway past.

Also notable was Norm Lewis (King Triton), who I last saw on stage a few years ago at Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn, N.J., as part of an ensemble cast in a revival of the 1984 musical, "Baby." Since then, he's been quite busy in "Les Mis," "Chicago," "Amour" and more, and it shows in his polished vocals. He brings new heart to the less-than-warm King Triton of Disney's creation, not to mention a younger face that is much easier on the eyes than a huge grey-haired cartoon.

Finally, Tituss Burgess gave a stand-out performance as Sebastian, everyone's favorite fussy crab. Adding comic relief and tender-hearted advice at just the right moment, Burgess was truly the master of song and showmanship as he led the play's two most colorful musical numbers: "Under the Sea" and "Kiss the Girl." Simply perfect casting for this role.

The Little Mermaid is being played at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre on West 46th St., the very same theatre that was home to Disney's "Beauty and The Beast", which I believe was Disney's first foray onto the Great White Way. I'd seen Beauty and the Beast twice before (once with my husband, once with my daughter) and thought it was bright, colorful and a great

experience for both adults and kids. But then, the whole story took place on land and was not nearly as challenging to play as "The Little Mermaid."

Going in to the show, I was interested in how they would make the transitions between the scenes under water and those on dry land. Because theatre is a representational art, the margin of error with being able to successfully pull this off is pretty high. It's not like you're going from the deck of a ship to land and back; all of the mermaid/merman scenes take place underwater, and more than once characters physically go from one to the other. The set design and direction, however, enabled the jump from landscape to seascape and back to be brilliantly executed, utilizing stage effects and scenery, and some well-placed pulleys.

All in all, "The Little Mermaid" is more suited for families familiar with Disney's rendering of the classic fairy tale than couples looking for a romantic evening. It is Disney, after all, which connotes kid-friendly and a certain amount of hokieness. For the right audience, this show will amaze and dazzle, as any good Broadway show should. Make sure to check it out if you can.

*Tickets available through Ticketmaster, (212) 307-4747, online at [www.disneyonbroadway.com](http://www.disneyonbroadway.com), or at the Lunt-Fontanne box office at 205 West 46th Street.*

*Running time is two hours, twenty-five minutes, with one fifteen-minute intermission.*

*Robin Kavanagh is a freelance writer based in NJ. She has written for numerous publications, including The New York Times, Asbury Park Press, Bergen Record, Parenting magazine, The Aquarian, North Jersey Media Group, and Blogcritics.org among others.*

[Back to: Theatre » Entertainment » Home](#)

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