Two standouts of the holiday film season

Disney's Beauty and the Beast is their best film since Fantasia

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise
Voices of Paige O'Hara, Robby Benson, David Ogden Stiers and Angela Lansbury
Now playing at Loews Copley Place

By ELAINE MCCORMICK

When I saw Fantasia, I thought, "This is the best animated movie ever made!" and it was. But it is no longer. Beauty and the Beast goes far beyond Fantasia. It has the same lavish animation, rich orchestral score, and creative choreography. But it also has a story line that carries you along breathlessly, and delightful characters.

The funniest characters are the magical denizens of the enchanted castle. Lumiere (Jerry Orbach), the womanizing candlestick, has a salad plate in his eye and a smirk on his, um, rim. Cogsworth (David Ogden Stiers), the type-A clock, worries frets and leaves a trail of springs and screws behind him. Mrs. Potis (Angela Lansbury), the motherly enchanted teapot, has a British accent, natters to her cowering pumpkin son, Chip (Bradley Michael Pierce), and dithers out advice to whoever will listen. And the enchanted furniture, a set of batteries playing a symphony, bops back, forth and waggles its tassel.

Patrick Watson gives plenty of opportunity for hilarious scenes like Lumiere singing "Be Our Guest," backed by a chorus of tap-dancing plates with matchstick canes and forks can-can-ing on huge, tiered cakes, spoons doing water ballet in vats of punch and feather dusters waving their skirts like Toulouse-Lautrec dancers.

But the best characters are Belle and the Beast (Paige O'Hara and Robby Benson). "In the original fairy tale, according to the producer, Don Hahn, "Beaumont's father goes to the castle and picks a rose. The beast is enraged, throws him in a dungeon, and agrees to let him go if he sends his daughter back in his place. She very passively follows her father's instructions, and the rest of the story is essentially about two people having dinner together every night with the beast repeatedly asking her to marry him."

I can easily imagine a 50th animated version of Beauty and the Beast, with Beauty a blond, blue-eyed innocent in a filmy dress, who is overcome by the on the floor. "Imagine" (Belle laughs, "the wife of that hothead, brash" man) "There must be more than this provincial life."

Gaston simply cannot understand why she refuses to marry him. He's the best hunter in the village. He's as big as a barge. He has biceps thicker than Popeye's. And "every b lack of Balm is covered with hair. What more could a girl want?" Certainly, his encouragement of flattering bloodies in pastel dresses is just last bravely.

But Belle's no ordinary girl. She wants romance and adventure. Only with the Beast can she find both. But first, he needs some taming. His temper is outrage. He shreds paintings and trashes his room until it's worse than a frat house. He prowls the house, growling and roaring at everyone, even until the wardrobe is affairs of art. He's said to be the king in his castle, and he expects to continue to get his way. He hasn't crouched on Belle.

Belle is also used to getting her own way. For every demand the Beast has, Belle has a contradictory answer. When he orders her to join him for dinner, she locks herself in her room. When he roars outside her door, "I thought I told you to come down to dinner," she snarls back, "I'm not hungry." When hethreats, "You won't stay in there forever," she tosses back, "Oh, yes, I can. They become locked in a contest of wills in which the Beast finally succumbs, because he has more to gain — the breaking of the enchantment.

Under Belle's influence, the Beast starts walking erect, rather than prowling like a wolf; eating peacefully, instead of slopping like a pig; dressing neatly, instead of roaming around dressed like a caveman; and most of all, he starts controlling his temper. Belle starts out brave, bright and determined, and by the end of the movie, she's still brave, bright and determined, but she's also in love. The Beast undergoes a complete personality change, gradually becoming more lovable, until, by the end, he's a soft, sensitive, New Age Beast.

In so many movies and animated films, the girl ends up loving the man because of his virility and machismo, even when loving means curtailing her own freedom. But in Beauty and the Beast, Belle loses nothing by loving the Beast. The Beast, by loving Belle, rides himself of his chauvinism, and gains a delightful partner. You can't help but suspect that, after a couple of years of living happily ever after, the Beast may lose somewhat into his former demanding self, but you know that when he does, Belle will be strong enough to handle it.

When I was growing up, cartoons implied that girls had to look like Barbie dolls or be as cute and cuddly as Pippi Longstocking to get by. Even after the regular film industry realized that it wasn't cool to produce sexist films, the animation industry continued to crank them out. But finally, however, they're coming around. Betty Boop, Jane Jetson and Minnie Mouse, watch out!

Gaston, Belle's narrow-minded suitor, on the floor. "Imagine me," Belle laughs, "the wife of that hothead, brash" man. "There must be more than this provincial life.

Star Trek VI is a triumphant return for the Enterprise and her crew

STAR TREK VI
THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY
Directed by Nicholas Meyer
Starring William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy and DeForest Kelley
At the Loews Charles

By REUVEN M. LERNER

What has the Federation of Planets countless times from dozens of evil characters and races; does Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country offer anything new?

Luckily for Star Trek fans, the answer to that question is "yes." While it has its weaknesses, Star Trek VI is exactly what a good Star Trek film should be, with a reasonable balance of aliens, character interactions, on-screen moralizing, special effects and one-liners.

Star Trek VI is set at the beginning of the end of the Klingon Empire, which has been fighting the Federation for many years. After the moon Praxis explodes, wreaking havoc with their atmosphere, the Klingons decide that they are unable to continue that war with the Federation, and offer to make peace with the Federation. Kirk and the Enterprise crew are chosen to escort Chancellor Gorkon, who heads the Klingon peace mission, into Federation space. Someone doesn't want the Captain Kirk (William Shatner, right) confronts Klingon Chancellor Gorkon (David Warner).