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The Practically Perfect Tale as Old as Time: A Comparative Analysis of the Branding of Beauty and the Beast and Mary Poppins

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THE PRACTICALLY PERFECT TALE AS OLD AS TIME: A
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE BRANDING OF BEAUTY
AND BEAST AND MARY POPPINS

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Abstract

The Walt Disney company and all of its heavily branded mastermind keep much of its planning and strategy under wraps from the general public. Although it has been observed amongst fans and business people how Disney markets their products and what their strategy looks like, it has not been compared between two similar projects that have followed the same strategic path. This paper will examine and compare the branding strategies of “Beauty and the Beast” and “Mary Poppins” from screen to stage and back to the screen again in hopes to better understand why one title may take in more at the box office than the other. In order to answer this question, interviews were held to examine the monetary success of all six iterations of these titles. What was discovered was that two out of three times, one title reigned supreme based on box office sales. For future research, this would open up doors to how Disney can better formulate strategies between different areas of the business while also deciding what kind of content to invest their expensive resources into.

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Introduction

Consumers know The Walt Disney Company as the branding king of the entertainment industry. Most consumers cannot get through an entire day without seeing some sort of Disney content whether that be in outdoor advertising, television content or advertising, merchandising, and more. Disney is notorious for never letting you leave their park without having entered a highly branded and curated gift shop. The organization understands that through consistent branding there is a strong image that can be made.

This narrative is specifically echoed with their entertainment content. With many popular classic movies coming from the Walt Disney studios there is a lot of money to be made. But why make money off of a popular movie once when you can make even more income off of it two, three, or even four more times? This is the premise behind there being multiple versions of “Beauty and the Beast” and “Mary Poppins” both on the big screen and on Broadway. Disney understands that there is still residual income to be made off of preliminary successful versions of their titles as proven in the list of remakes they are developing for the coming years¹. Interestingly enough, there are branding trends that transcend time and the fact that many of these versions of these well-known stories came out over a span of over fifty years. This paper seeks to examine the branding trends between these titles and which one of the two, “Beauty and the Beast” and “Mary Poppins” comes out being the most successful each time.

¹Oswald, Anjelica, and Kirsten Acuna. "Disney Has 21 Live-action Movies of Its Animated Classics Planned - Here They All Are." INSIDER. March 22, 2019. Accessed April 12, 2019. <https://www.thisisinsider.com/disney-live-action-remakes-2017-2>.

Literature Review

Although there is not much literature out there that compares the branding strategies between the titles of “Beauty and the Beast” and “Mary Poppins” as well as an explanation regarding their similar journey from original classic film to the Broadway stage and eventually a high-budget Hollywood blockbuster remake. Individually, there is a handful of articles and literature that discusses each title and the individual execution of its branding strategy. There are common themes that coincide between the two titles. There is a common theme in Disney’s strategy of revival; the idea that there is still money to be made even if the preliminary versions of these films have already been executed. Another concept that heavily comes into play when marketing both of these titles is the idea of strategic partnerships. Both films, in their original form, use brand deals and partnerships with other non-entertainment entities to market their movie as one that audiences must see.

The Original Films (1964-1991)

Beauty and the Beast has plenty of literature written about the creative concepts of the film as well as its box office success and critical acclaim, which is the more contemporary of the two original films. However, there are a good amount of industry articles that analyze the branding of this film because of the particular time frame of when it entered the Disney catalog. “Beauty and the Beast” premiered in what is considered the Disney “renaissance” period. In fact, according to KIMT3 News “the Walt Disney Pictures brand had become so tarnished that they had resorted to slapping a different studio name

on films so people would consider seeing”² their animated features. This period of Disney animation and film creation started with “The Little Mermaid” in 1989, but “Beauty and the Beast” really propelled the company into the critically acclaimed and highly praised production house it is today. This renaissance marks the birth of the highly sought after millennial audience of today which contributes to Disney’s brand positioning when it comes to this title and how it propels into the current market of entertainment products.

The New York Times’ review of the animated feature was over the moon about Disney’s take on Jean Cocteau's 1947 black-and-white film. The critic, Janet Maslin, believed that this rebirth of Disney animation with “Beauty and the Beast” and “The Little Mermaid” had brought “the genre new sophistication without sacrificing any of the delight”³. This sophistication paired with the childlike nature of the genre of animation is exactly what Disney marketers and branders wanted to bring to this film to get Disney back in the good graces in the court of public opinion considering their flops leading up to the release.

A 1991 article from Ad Age⁴ explains some of the marketing strategies that the studios executed leading up to the highly anticipated release of the 1991 film. Overall, Disney advertising plans and budgets are kept under wraps, however, the article notes a very interesting strategic partnership with Burger King during the highly important holiday season promotional push. This came as a surprise considering that the studio had a

²“Beauty and the Beast (1991) vs. Beauty and the Beast (2017).” KIMT News. Accessed February 15, 2019.

<http://kimt.web.franklyinc.com/story/34998800/beauty-and-the-beast-1991-vs-beauty-and-the-beast-2017>.

³Maslin, Janet. "Review/Film; Disney's 'Beauty and the Beast' Updated in Form and Content." *New York Times*, November 13, 1991, The Arts sec.

⁴ By Marcy Magiera. "Disney adds to tie-ins". *Advertising Age*. February 11, 1991.

<https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3SJ4-G9S0-000S-83FB-00000-00&context=1516831>.

long-term relationship with Burger King's direct competitor, McDonald's. According to the Ad Age article, this relationship was likely weakened from the previous promotions that did not provide great returns at the box office. This pairing sounds unusual. Many companies today, let alone Disney, would not want to be associated with the fast-food industry, but this move set the stage, for the future success of the Broadway production and 2017 studio live-action remake. Now as for "Mary Poppins" a movie that was released 27 years before "Beauty and the Beast" had quite a unique brand position. Although there is not much literature to review regarding any analysis of the original advertising, there is a particularly interesting article from a 1964 article of the New York Times titled "Advertising: Mary Poppins Fad Designed"⁵.

The New York Times article explains that in addition to an aggressive print advertising campaign the studios would license the title to create a plethora of merchandise connected to the film. This is interesting considering that Disney's aggressive merchandising is usually connected to their animated features, however, this strategy even applied to "Mary Poppins" as it similarly applies to the live-action Star Wars and Marvel films today.

Overall, these two films obviously have very different strategies considering they are different film mediums; however, they are both considered Disney classics and have a huge nostalgia factor, but that nostalgia factor rests with different audiences. The Broadway versions of these original films, however, have a very different target audience.

⁵ Sloane, Leonard. "Advertising: Mary Poppins Fad Designed." *The New York Times*, July 24, 1964, Food Fashions Family Furnishings sec.

The Broadway Box Office Hit?

All Disney on Broadway shows face a challenge. They will inevitably be compared to “The Lion King” which a phenomenon that will likely not ever be able to be replicated again. This is both a blessing and a curse. Being associated with that show can do wonders for quality perception, but many people do not manage their expectations and expect every show Disney puts out to be as artfully and meticulously planned as “The Lion King”. “Mary Poppins” and “Beauty and the Beast” both faced this challenge and many others.

According to Playbill.com⁶, Beauty and the Beast opened on Broadway on April 18th, 1994 at the Palace Theater. It marked Disney Theatrical Group’s first Broadway venture, which was put together by a team from the theme parks. Selling a Broadway show is admittedly much different than selling a studio feature because it has such a different target audience. Disney studio feature films can easily target families and children, of course, while Broadway audiences are usually upper middle class and well educated because of the higher price point of a Broadway ticket compared to a movie ticket. With all this in mind, the brand positioning of a Disney Broadway production and its brand needs to be uniquely and delicately made to appeal to a Broadway ticket-buying audience, but also a Disney audience. This can be challenging due to the association of animation and children’s movies with the Disney brand. It’s important to educate consumers that they are getting an

⁶“Beauty and the Beast Broadway @ Palace Theatre - Tickets and Discounts.” Playbill. Accessed February 15, 2019.
<http://www.playbill.com/production/beauty-and-the-beast-palace-theatre-vault-0000009145>.

elevated entertainment experience and not an iteration of the movie script on stage or something that one would see at the Disney parks.

“One woman stands behind Broadway’s best” is a piece about Nancy Coyne, co-founder of Serino Coyne, an advertising agency that is tasked with the art of selling Broadway shows. She is a branding whiz when it comes to musicals. According to President of Disney Theatrical Group, Thomas Schumacher⁷, “it was Coyne...who figured out that Disney’s three Broadway musicals [in the early 2000’s] — ‘Beauty and the Beast’, ‘The Lion King’ and ‘Aida’— could be sold together and referred to as ‘Disney on Broadway,’ a clever positioning that enhanced the Disney name as well as the individual shows”. One can infer, this positioning has given Disney a real advantage on Broadway. The company is separating itself from normal Broadway shows and calling out the Disney brand to bring in Disney fans while also discerning that these shows are specifically made for Broadway implying that it will not be similar to a theme park show.

Mary Poppins opened on Broadway on November 16, 2006, at the Disney-owned New Amsterdam Theater⁸. This show faced competition with other similar Broadway shows since its inception. This show held a heavy pull on nostalgia with older audiences similar to other shows such as “South Pacific”, “Hair” and “West Side Story” that were on Broadway around the same time according to New York Times author Patrick Healy in his

⁷Kuchwara, Michael. "One Woman Stands behind Broadway's Best." NBCNews.com. August 21, 2005. Accessed March 29, 2019.
http://www.nbcnews.com/id/8974469/ns/business-us_business/t/one-woman-stands-behind-broadways-best/.

⁸ "Mary Poppins Broadway @ New Amsterdam Theatre - Tickets and Discounts." Playbill. Accessed March 29, 2019.
<http://www.playbill.com/production/mary-poppins-new-amsterdam-theatre-vault-0000008728>.

article "How to Sell a Nanny, a Mermaid and a Lion"⁹. Mary Poppins received mixed reviews, so pinned against these other shows it made a slight struggle to pull in ticket sales.

The original New York Times review of the "Beauty and the Beast" does not spare any criticisms. Many Broadway critics are wary of the commercialization of the industry. David Richards starts the review with the following:

*"As Broadway musicals go, "Beauty and the Beast" belongs right up there with the Empire State Building, F. A. O. Schwarz and the Circle Line boat tours. It is hardly a triumph of art, but it'll probably be a whale of a tourist attraction. It is Las Vegas without the sex, Mardi Gras without the booze and Madame Tussaud's without the waxy stares. You don't watch it, you gape at it, knowing that nothing in Dubuque comes close."*¹⁰

Similarly, the New York Times' review of Mary Poppins opens like so:

*"She glides through the skies like an umbrella-powered stealth bomber, ever ready to dump her cargo of good advice on unsuspecting households. When she touches ground, on the stage of the New Amsterdam Theater, you can't help noticing that while she looks like Joan Crawford trying to be nice, she sounds more like Dr. Phil."*¹¹

⁹ Healy, Patrick. "How to Sell a Nanny, a Mermaid and a Lion." The New York Times. April 19, 2009. Accessed March 29, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/20/theater/20disn.html>.

¹⁰ Richards, David. "Review/Theater: Beauty and the Beast; Disney Does Broadway, Dancing Spoons and All." The New York Times. April 19, 1994. Accessed March 29, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/04/19/theater/review-theater-beauty-and-the-beast-disney-does-broadway-dancing-spoons-and-all.html>.

¹¹ Brantley, Ben. "Meddler on the Roof." The New York Times. November 17, 2006. Accessed March 29, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/17/theater/reviews/17popp.html>.

This, of course, is not what Disney was going for, but being that “Beauty and the Beast” was put up by park executives and not a Broadway producer this could be expected by outsiders. However, Mary Poppins didn’t bring the magical gleam that critics were expecting to Broadway.

Overall, this instance and Disney being the brand it makes it difficult for the theatrical group to rebrand itself as an elevated and sophisticated experience. This challenge also comes on a smaller scale to the same studio that attempted to remake the beloved original takes of these films. It’s easy to see that the concept of revival is not an easy one to pull off. When tampering with the original version of someone’s favorite movie there are a lot of important branding choices that need to be made.

The Remakes

Scott Davis explains the branding strategy of the 2017 remake of “Beauty and the Beast” in his article titled “Disney As Master Marketer: A Tale As Old As Time”. Davis breaks the box office success of this movie into five categories of successful marketing: choosing a target audience, being good at storytelling, finding new relevance, leveraging your ecosystem, and making it inspiring.¹² Disney knows that this title appeals to multiple audiences. These audiences include kids who grew up with the original cartoon that are now young adults in addition to a new audience of families with young children. Additionally, Disney is notoriously good at storytelling, therefore, recreating the old to make something new for example adding characters, songs, and being able to extend

¹²Davis, Scott. "Disney As Master Marketer: A Tale As Old As Time." Forbes. March 23, 2017. Accessed March 29, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/scottdavis/2017/03/22/beautyandthebeast/#2c41a5b344cc>.

character development was easy for the studio, especially with the fact that this movie was 45 minutes longer than the original. Disney was also able to find new relevance with this film by casting Emma Watson as the lead. The generation that grew up on Disney animation classics also was old enough to understand the relevance of Harry Potter. Using Emma Watson in this capacity was a smart move. Watson also drove the “inspiration” branding for this show due to her real-life activism and similarities to Belle as a free spirit and feminist icon. Disney also manipulated their ecosystem to make sure there was ample hype around their trailer releases for the film.

“Mary Poppins Returns” being a long-awaited sequel and not a remake uses a slightly different strategy than “Beauty and the Beast”. According to an analysis of the advertising on Cinema Slant¹³, it seems to brand itself as a completely new entity from the original movie. The vibe and color scheme which heavily contribute to the branding deals with darker colors which are completely different than the light-hearted movie musical advertising from the 1964 film. The main brand materials specifically focus on the lead, Emily Blunt’s face. This emphasis is similar to the original advertising. The children are not seen in any of the stills which are an interesting strategy. Is this done to separate this film from a children’s movie? The length of the film, clocking in at over two hours, certainly does not reflect that of a children’s movie. The article also discusses two options that occur while the writer is observing the campaign: “A) The movie is much deeper but Disney wants to keep things light and fluffy, or B) The movie as a whole is this superficial”¹⁴. The

¹³Thilk, Chris. “Mary Poppins Returns – Marketing Recap.” Cinematic Slant. January 25, 2019. Accessed March 29, 2019.

<https://cinematicslant.com/2018/12/17/mary-poppins-returns-marketing-recap/>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

writer here believes the imagery of these advertisements solely relies on Emily Blunt, therefore making it superficial. This is not necessarily true. Many times movie marketers rely on A-list leads to bringing in sales and it is artfully and tastefully done in this instance. The branding is consistent but separates this film from its other iterations as an original and as a Broadway musical.

It's also important to look into a specific and consistent tactic that Disney uses when branding any project they work on. This tactic is strategic alliances and partnerships. In the case of "Mary Poppins Returns" Disney partnered with a Nissan to create an advertisement for both the new film and one of their cars.¹⁵ This is similarly found in the marketing materials for the original "Beauty and the Beast" with the partnership with Burger King as discussed before and pictured in Appendix 1. These strategic partnerships that Disney often takes advantage of with large consumer trends are interesting and consistent within the company. Christian Sylt in his article titled "Disney Sponsorship Push"¹⁶ notes alliances across the business with companies ranging from Hewlett-Packard to Kodak and Nestle. Sylt also mentions that "Disney has been involved in partnerships since its founder enlisted Coca-Cola to help finance his first theme park in the 1950s. An innovative marketing deal was struck, giving Coca-Cola the rights to be the sole supplier of soft drinks within the park in return for its backing. It remains a partner to this day"¹⁷. It's no surprise that Disney has used this concept since inception. There is a mutual benefit from this. To be showcased by a

¹⁵Nissan USA. "Nissan and Mary Poppins Returns "Technology"." Advertisement. YouTube. November 27, 2018. Accessed March 29, 2019.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noLADDCqdUo>.

¹⁶ Sylt, Christian. "Disneys Sponsorship Push." *Marketing Week* 32, no. 15 (April 9, 2009): 49.
<http://rlib.pace.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=48487359&site=bsi-live&scope=site>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

company as favorable and popular as Disney would be great for any consumer product business. On Disney's end, it gets money to finance its large budget projects. Another example of this was written by author David Moin for WWD: Women's Wear Daily in an article titled "Disney Shops Headed for Penney's"¹⁸. This partnership helps JCPenney because "the Disney deal bolsters...efforts to revamp [JCPenney's] children's department for back-to-school...and could serve as a magnet to attract other brands"¹⁹. At the time this gave JCPenney a serious edge on their competition. Disney got a way to distribute their product to more consumers that possibly come from a different background compared to their park-going consumers. Additionally, getting into more children's clothing sections in retailers across the country doesn't necessarily hurt their brand recognition among children, a large audience for their entertainment content, both movies and television shows.

The articles I've mentioned thus far give examples of a few out of nearly an infinite amount of ways that Disney has used strategic alliances to market their products and build their brand. This trend is somewhat surprising because of Disney's sensitivity when it comes to bad press or bad brand image. When bringing in other companies to partner with it can be really easy to inherit their bad press or brand image that you essentially have no control over.

Another essential thing to understand about Disney's strategy in the order and branding of these titles is the concept of revival. Did the original creatives behind "Beauty

¹⁸ "Disney Shops Headed For Penney's." 2012. *WWD: Women's Wear Daily* 204 (60): 2-1.
<http://rilib.pace.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=80216787&site=bsi-live&scope=site>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

and the Beast” and “Mary Poppins” ever anticipate the massive empire that these titles could become; overtaking Broadway, merchandising, and the big screen? We may never know, but despite that, current Disney executives are pushing this concept hard because it has proven to be successful and popular among Disney fans and even general consumers.

Anousha Sakoui and Christopher Palmeri discuss this concept in their article in Bloomberg Businessweek titled “Disney’s Princesses Get a Little Live Action”²⁰. This article, written in 2015, talks about the upcoming plans for Disney’s schedule of remakes. The list includes Cinderella, The Jungle Book, Beauty and the Beast, as well as Dumbo. The article makes a good point about the Disney movie remakes:

“They revive classic characters for a new generation of kids, and their already smitten parents may be especially willing to shell out for related merchandise. With DVD sales declining and digital downloads on the rise, studios can’t just reissue old films in new packaging, says Robert Levin, a former Disney marketing executive and president of market research company Screen Engine. ‘There used to be a rerelease of a classic film every seven years,’ he says. ‘Now reimagining them is what’s hot.’”²¹

This concept works for Disney, but is essential to the titles “Beauty and the Beast” and “Mary Poppins”. It is not enough for Disney to only remake these movies on the big screen, they also must do so on the Broadway stage in order to totally exhaust

²⁰ Palmeri, Christopher, and Anousha Sakoui. 2015. “Disney’s Princesses Get a Little Live Action.” *Bloomberg Businessweek*, no. 4418 (March): 30–31.
<http://rlib.pace.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=101426591&site=bsi-live&scope=site>.

²¹ *Ibid.*

their revenue streams while also artfully reimagining the way these stories are told.

At the end of the day, The Walt Disney Company wants to tell stories.

Overall remaking a classic movie that has also had a run as a Broadway musical is not an easy task; you must separate it and give people a reason to come see it again. The obvious time gap of over 20 years for both of these titles an advantage as they both have extreme nostalgia tied to them.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The purpose of writing this paper is to compare and contrast the branding of The Walt Disney Company's owned properties of "Beauty and the Beast" and "Mary Poppins" in their similar journey from the original movie, to Broadway stage, to big-budget Hollywood remake. What tactics does Disney use to market and brand these movies? Which of these titles does better monetarily overall?

Methodology

Doing quantitative research on this topic is really important. In the entertainment industry, as many knows, tracking monetary success is essential to measuring the overall success of a piece of content. In order to track this, stats were found on IMDB and IMDB Pro to see demographic and box office success of both iterations of both films. In order to gauge Broadway success, box office numbers are also extremely important. Access to these was available through BroadwayWorld.com, which provides a detailed and accurate report on ticket statistics for each show.

Additionally, understanding the branding for these titles requires some interviews with experts that play a part in the branding of "Mary Poppins" and "Beauty and the Beast"

that is why interviews were conducted with Disney staff and executives to get an insider's perspective on how certain aspects of these titles were marketed in each execution and why they were marketed that way. These interviews were informative and really contributed to the overall understanding of an answer to the research question. See Appendix 2 for a list of interview questions that were asked.

With research regarding humans comes a discussion of ethics that must be had. Research ethics are important in order to protect the rights, dignity, in addition to the welfare of the participants. For this purpose, for an interview, this means keeping certain confidential information off the record and not pressing interviewees to reveal any confidential information or even information they are not comfortable with revealing to an outside researcher. Although there are no plans to publish this research, the IRB course was still taken just to be safe and to understand the ethics behind researching on human beings.

Results and Discussion

Looking at the physical branding materials that were shown to consumers gives understanding as to how these titles are marketed. This will be shown in chronological order to see the evolution of Disney's visual brand design.

The first movie to come out was "Mary Poppins" in 1964. There is plenty of advertising to analyze from Mary Poppins release. Some of it is quite inconsistent. It almost seems like Disney is trying to capitalize on the fact that it is a movie musical in the middle of a popular era for the movie musical rather than the fact that it is a Disney movie. For example in the advertisement pictured in Appendix 3, there is a quite odd visual

representation of the heads of Julie Andrews and Dick Van Dyke floating in space on the poster. Additionally, there is an illustration of them dancing as if they were love interests in a classic movie musical, which as we know in the plot of “Mary Poppins” is not the case. The movie poster is missing the colorful aspects of the movie like the 2-D animation in the penguin scene which is showcased in the 2018 poster that will be discussed later on. This may be because up until this point Disney was known for animated classics such as “Snow White and the Seven Dwarves”, “Cinderella”, and “Sleeping Beauty” and it wanted to separate this movie from that brand reputation. There is definitely also a good reason to show the faces of two A-list stars at the time on the movie poster. Of course, this would attract movie-goers to go see the film because they may be attracted to the case. Without the visual of Julie Andrews’ and Dick Van Dyke’s faces, consumers may not connect the dots that there is a star in the movie. Consumers have short attention spans after all “Microsoft found that since the year 2000 the average attention span dropped from 12 seconds to eight seconds”²². Consumers may not think to read the cast list or look at any text other than the title on the poster. These famous faces also draw a lot of attention to the advertisement. So, despite the fact that two floating heads look quite odd, they do command attention from onlookers.

The next title to come out is the beloved “Beauty and the Beast” in 1991. Based on Appendix 4, you can see that the original film focuses on very visual marketing materials as well. The animated faces of the Beast and Belle are apparent in all the advertising. There is no mistaking that when a consumer sees these characters that they don't know where they

²² McSpadden, Kevin. "Science: You Now Have a Shorter Attention Span Than a Goldfish." Time. May 14, 2015. Accessed April 12, 2019. <http://time.com/3858309/attention-spans-goldfish/>.

are from. They are also always pictured together. It seems that the contrast in small human girl to large male beast makes for an eye grabber to consumers and show the theme of duality from the film.

Overall, the original films had very visual advertising. In “Mary Poppins” marketing, there were floating visuals of the actor’s faces without such a focus on the animation such as for “Beauty and the Beast” where much of the advertising was focused on the duality of Belle versus the Beast. Similarly, though, both of these films relied on visual and literal views of their main characters to attract consumer attention. This tactic heavily contrasts typical Broadway branding.

As mentioned, Disney, as a whole, relies on visuals of their lead characters to create a brand, for example, the Disney princess franchise. These characters consistently look the same in animated form when they are all pictured together. For a Disney on Broadway show featuring an animated princess on marketing materials would completely tarnish their brand and disregard them as “not serious” in the market of Broadway musicals from the standpoint of a Broadway consumer. In my interview with Robin Wyatt, VP of Marketing at Disney Theatrical Group, she mentioned a series of focus groups done on target audiences for Frozen on Broadway. She noted that one categorized problem they ran into was what they coined “the princess problem”. Consumers felt that the idea of princesses being associated with a show, specifically a Disney show, makes the show appear “not serious” enough for a Broadway audience²³. The target audience for Disney movie goers differs greatly from the Broadway going audience. The profile of a Broadway

²³ "Interview with Disney Theatrical Group VP of Marketing." Interview by author. July 16, 2018.

ticket buyer is an interesting demographic and consists of some of the following astonishing statistics from the Broadway League:

- Sixty-six percent of the audiences were female.
- A record 2.1 million admissions were made by children and teens.
- The average age of the Broadway theatregoer was 40.6 years old, the lowest since 2000.
- One quarter of all tickets were purchased by non-Caucasian theatregoers.
- Of theatregoers age 25 or older, 81% had completed college and 41% had earned a graduate degree.
- The average annual household income of the Broadway theatregoer was \$222,120.²⁴

As you can see, this unique and college-educated audience can be sensitive to branding especially when they are paying for something that is considered “an elevated experience”. Marketing and branding cannot cheapen that. Conversely, movie marketers for Disney appropriately focus on families and children to come to see their films. In the eyes of Disney Theatrical and VP of Marketing Robin Wyatt children and large families cannot always afford to see a Broadway show²⁵; tickets are a minimum of four times the price of a movie ticket. This bumps up the target audience to the demographics mentioned before

An important concept of the specific branding of a Broadway show is the design of the show’s playbill. This is usually also a large part of the branding for the show and not just a design that audiences see on the theater marquis. As you can see in Playbill’s

²⁴*The Demographics of the Broadway Audience 2017-2018 SEASON*. Report. October 2018. Accessed March 29, 2019. <https://www.broadwayleague.com/research/research-reports/>.

²⁵ "Interview with Disney Theatrical Group VP of Marketing." Interview by author. July 16, 2018.

summary of the evolution of the playbill²⁶, over the years Playbill Design has gone from black and white as a way to display the title and theme of the show to a colorful eye-grabbing spectacle that is an expression and a branded representation of the show and what it stands for. This is where Disney meets a challenge.

This led to the design of Disney's infamous playbill cover for "Beauty and the Beast" (see Appendix 5) which perfectly captures the story that we all know and love, but without the child-like and animated visuals of the animated feature which could cheapen the image of the show in the eyes of a Broadway ticket-buying audience. According to Disney Theatrical Group VP of Marketing, Robin Wyatt, Disney's employees were not sure that the Playbill visual was perfect, but considering this logo was created by park executives it is not a bad first try for Broadway²⁷.

Disney Theatrical Group needed to create a unique playbill for "Mary Poppins" as well. Without the challenge of having to personify animated characters, it was easier to come up with which piece of iconic imagery would sit on the playbill and would essentially cause brand recognition, the type that when looked at would be easily recognizable as "Mary Poppins". This led to the design of a silhouette of the leading lady sailing with her umbrella over the rooftops of London (See Appendix 5). There were other challenges when it came to this show though. In an interview conducted with Jack Eldon, VP of Domestic Touring as Disney Theatrical he also noted that in focus groups regarding "Mary Poppins" Broadway run, a good amount of consumers thought that this show was a revival when in

²⁶Culwell-Block, Logan. "The Evolution of the Playbill Design From 1885–2018." Playbill. August 24, 2018. Accessed March 29, 2019.

<http://www.playbill.com/article/the-evolution-of-the-playbill-design-from-18852018>.

²⁷ "Interview with Disney Theatrical Group VP of Marketing." Interview by author. July 16, 2018.

fact it was most definitely not²⁸. Although it is unclear how this may impact sales, it is, in fact, wrong information and could possibly impact brand perception and messaging pertaining to the show.

Consistently in the branding for both of these shows uses imagery of the characters without showing detailed facial details or realistic human photography. This is a theme amongst mostly all Disney playbills. This is most likely because the visual representation of the characters as real people could remind consumers of a Disney parks meet and greet. Disney Broadway marketers do not want people, by any means, thinking they are going to see a show that will be similar in any way to a show at the Disney parks according to my interview with Vice President of Marketing at Disney Theatrical Group, Robin Wyatt. Conversely, the playbill cover should not be so unrecognizable that Disney fans visiting New York City wanting to see a Broadway show would not be able to recognize that it is a Disney show.

There was quite a large gap in time between the last versions of these titles and their re-release as remakes with “Beauty and the Beast” in 2017 and “Mary Poppins Returns” in 2018. Of course, like the original movies, much of the branding for the two remakes relied on visuals of the leading characters.

For “Beauty and the Beast” the movie poster showcases Emma Watson as Belle to entice fans but also shows the duality of the Beast versus the other characters (see Appendix 7). Surely audiences were wondering how Disney would turn this animated feature into a live-action film without it looking cheap or corny so this visual is used to

²⁸ "Interview with Disney Theatrical Group VP of Touring." Interview by author. July 17, 2018.

reassure audiences that this is the same story we all know and love, but an enhanced and updated version with the same Disney magic.

Disney also marketed this movie with yet another strategic partnership. This one, in particular, garnered quite a bit of press from the mainstream media. “When some Google Homeowners turned on their virtual assistants...[on opening day of “Beauty and the Beast”], the device delivered the usual weather forecast, calendar of events and other updates. And then they heard something else: ‘By the way, Disney’s live-action ‘Beauty and the Beast’ opens today.”²⁹ Although both Disney and Google deny this is an advertisement it is hard to deny that there was zero influence from Disney to put this into the Home’s script for that morning. Despite the fact that consumers were not pleased about it, it still makes for a great branding tactic whether it got this press or not. Disney and Google have a long-term partnership so this is no surprise.

Similarly, “Mary Poppins Returns”, yet again, focused on visual marketing to show consumers how this movie will be tastefully remade yet similar and different in its own ways to the original Julie Andrews classic. Ironically, the movie poster for this film incorporates the 2-D animation that lacked in the originals’ movie poster, but what is essential to the original Mary Poppins (see Appendix 8). This was a good move to rope in consumers that have a strong pull towards the original Mary Poppins, often grandparents that want to take their kids to see an updated movie version of one of their favorites. It also, as seen previously, features a strong photographic presence of a star, Emily Blunt. This lets

²⁹When Some Google Home Owners Turned on Their Virtual Assistants Thursday Morning. "Google Home Confuses Users with Apparent Ad for 'Beauty and the Beast'." CNNMoney. March 16, 2017. Accessed March 29, 2019. <https://money.cnn.com/2017/03/16/technology/google-home-beauty-and-the-beast-ad/>.

consumers know that this is not a complete reiteration of the original, but a new story with a twist. It also attracts fans of Blunt. The marketers of the movie also teased some of the new songs, again, to let consumers know this is not simply a remake, but a new story.

Also, with no surprise, there were plenty of brand partnerships to be had with this recent film. Strategic alliances included product partnerships with companies like Subway to make toys for their children's meals, L'Oreal Paris to make lipsticks with Mary Poppins Returns branding on it, Nissan as mentioned before, as well as Pandora bracelets with Mary Poppins theme charms including an umbrella and Mary's classic carpet bag.³⁰ Interestingly, these various collaborations center around family brands as well as female-focused brands. Nissan feels slightly out of place considering that it is not a small consumer product like the others, but it does fit into a category of something a little pricier like the Pandora charms.

Now that there is a general understanding of the branding it is important to track the success of these titles from the time they were released up until today. Box office sales are a huge facet of success in the entertainment industry so that is the measurement that will be used. Overall, none of these movies has done poorly on the big screen or on Broadway. With Disney's reputation today it is unlikely that any of their movies would fail beyond any sort of redemption. But one of these titles has to have done better than the other. That is what this section will seek a resolution to.

³⁰ Moore, Jessica. "Top Brand Partnerships With Mary Poppins Returns." Hollywood Branded Blog. December 28, 2018. Accessed March 29, 2019.
<https://blog.hollywoodbranded.com/top-brand-partnerships-with-mary-poppins-returns>.

“Beauty and the Beast” is like Disney’s golden child. It made them a killing at the box office in 1991. On the best weekend that the movie saw in theaters it made \$12,239,650³¹ which, when adjusted for inflation would amount to about \$22,785,905 in the year 2018. Overall, in the United States and Canada, the movie grossed \$218,967,620 while worldwide the gross was \$440,118,382³² which when adjusted for inflation amounts to \$407,640,362 and \$819,344,963 respectively. For comparison, the gross in the United States and Canada is seven million dollars bigger compared to another huge money-maker for Disney, “Frozen”, which grossed \$400,738,009³³ domestically. You can see now why Disney has done so much with this title. It was a huge hit and was the “Frozen” of its day. In 2017 the Hollywood remake grossed \$504,014,165 domestically and \$1,263,521,126 worldwide it is not too far off from the original animated movie.

What was surprising to me was the success of the older of the two titles “Mary Poppins”. It’s box office sales grossed \$102,272,727³⁴ domestically which doesn’t sound that impressive, but when adjusted for inflation the film would have made a total of \$837,657,213 in 2018. That is over two hundred million dollars more than “Star Wars: Episode VIII - The Last Jedi”, one of the Star Wars franchise’s best and most popular movies, made in 2017³⁵. “Mary Poppins” was quite popular for its day. In 2018, the remake,

³¹“Beauty and the Beast.” *IMDB Pro*, 1991. Accessed March 29, 2019.
<https://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0101414/boxoffice>.

³² *Ibid*.

³³“Frozen.” *IMDB Pro*, 2013. Accessed March 29, 2019.
<https://pro.imdb.com/title/tt2294629/boxoffice>.

³⁴ “Mary Poppins.” *IMDB Pro*, 1964. Accessed March 29, 2019.
<https://pro.imdb.com/title/tt0058331/boxoffice>.

³⁵“Star Wars: Episode VIII - The Last Jedi.” *IMDB Pro*, 2017. Accessed March 29, 2019.
<https://pro.imdb.com/title/tt2527336/boxoffice>.

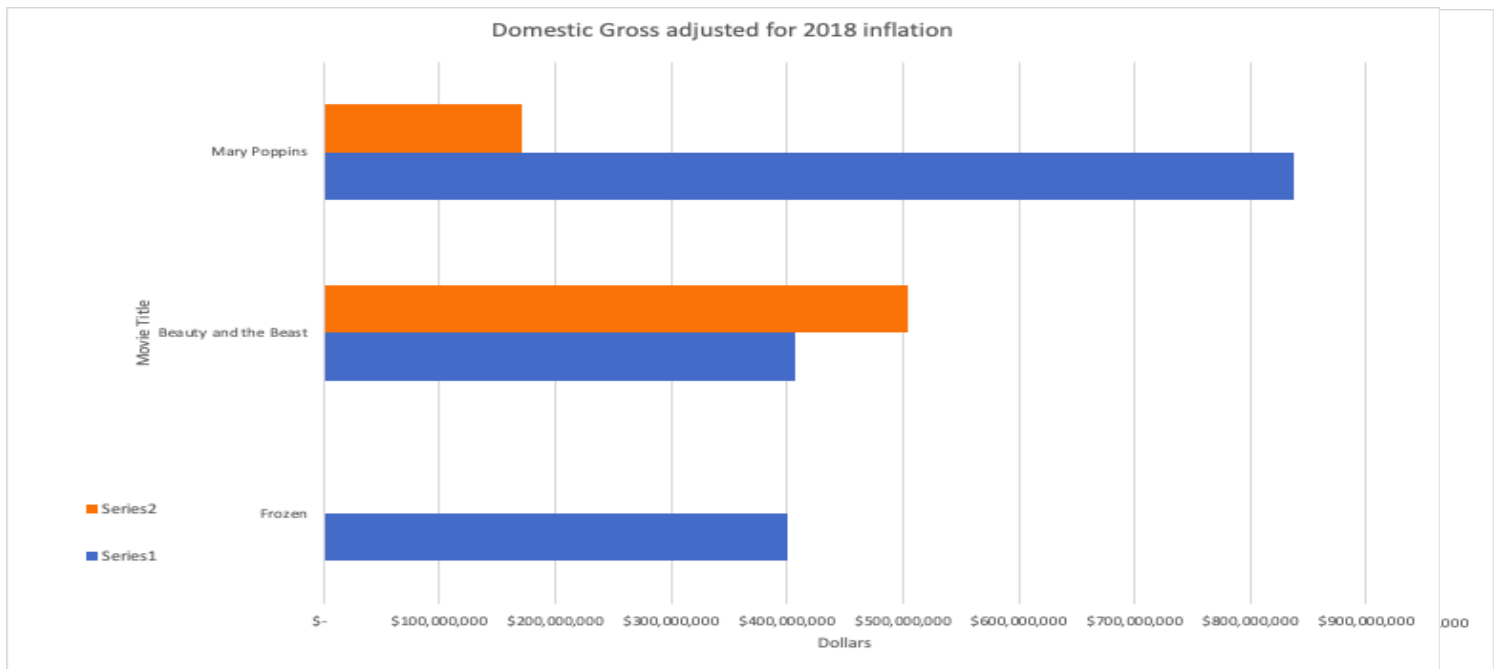
“Mary Poppins Returns” grossed \$171,852,597³⁶ domestically and \$348,797,615 worldwide which is abysmal compared to the original and to the other remake. Figure 1 below shows a table summary of the movie box office grosses domestically. See Figure 2 below for a visual comparison of grosses. The orange bars represent the remake of each film and blue colored bars represent the original. The table below that lists the dollar amounts in table form.

Figure 1: Domestic Box Office Sales of Mary Poppins, Beauty and the Beast and Frozen Adjusted for 2018 Inflation

<u>Movie Title</u>	<u>Original Box Office Sales</u>	<u>Remake Box Office Sales</u>
Beauty and the Beast	\$407,640,362	\$504,014,165
Mary Poppins	\$837,657,213	\$171,852,597
Frozen	\$400,738,009	n/a

Figure 2: Domestic Box Office Comparison of Original and Remakes of Beauty and the Beast and Mary Poppins versus Frozen Adjusted for 2018 Inflation

³⁶ "Mary Poppins Returns." *IMDB Pro*, 2018. Accessed March 29, 2019. <https://pro.imdb.com/title/tt5028340/boxoffice>.



Why is this so? A possibility of its weak box office sales compared to Disney's other remakes is because of the buzz behind the release of "Aquaman" with Game of Thrones star Jason Momoa which grossed \$335,061,807³⁷ during the same time. "Mary Poppins Returns" could just not keep up with the hype behind this movie. Additionally, "Mary Poppins Returns" had a long run time at over two hours and ten minutes, much too long for any small child to sit through. Finally, the audience for this film, likely older men and women who were fans of the originals were just not drawn to see this remake with an actress that was not appealing to them. Emily Blunt appeals to a somewhat younger demographic because of her more recent popular credits in "The Devil Wears Prada" and "A Quiet Place" compared to an actress like Julie Andrews or Betty White who's credits may support an

³⁷ "Aquaman." IMDB Pro, December 2018. Accessed May 5, 2019.
https://pro.imdb.com/title/tt1477834/?ref_=instant_tt_1&q=aquaman.

older audience. Disney assumed that combining a younger actress with an older title would pull in multiple audiences, but this was not so and is reflected in the box office sales.

Broadway is an entirely different beast. Box office sales are essential to making sure a show can stay up and running and hopefully recoup its initial investment. It is not like a movie which has a set distributor that will send the movie to theaters and home distribution no matter what.

Disney has a reputation on Broadway of not having content that always appeals to Broadway's top fans and consumers but brings in big box office receipts and the data reflects that. A "successful" Broadway show can be determined by many different factors, including but not limited to, box office sales, run time in months or years, seats filled per show, critic reviews, and most importantly, gross potential. Gross potential gives a percentage of box office sales by taking into account the time. A show with a good gross potential or GP would be filling the maximum amount of seats at the maximum set price. "Beauty and the Beast" ran for over thirteen years on Broadway. During that time the show grossed a total of \$429,158,458 with a gross potential of 56.25%³⁸. Although this seems like a win for Disney, a gross potential of 56.25% is not great compared to their other projects. For example, "The Lion King" has a gross potential of 97.42% over its 21-year run³⁹. Additionally, one of Disney Theatrical Group's notorious flops, "The Little Mermaid"

³⁸BroadwayWorld.com, and The Broadway League. Beauty and the Beast Historical Grosses. 2007. Raw data. New York, New York.
<https://www.broadwayworld.com/grossesshow.cfm?show=BEAUTY-AND-THE-BEAST&year=2007&allall=on>

³⁹BroadwayWorld.com, and The Broadway League. The Lion King Historical Grosses. 2019. Raw data. New York, New York.
<https://www.broadwayworld.com/grossesshow.cfm?show=THE-LION-KING&year=2019&allall=on>

grossed at 82.01%⁴⁰, although this show ran for a much shorter amount of time than “Beauty and the Beast”. Out of the 8,833,082 total seats in the theaters that “Beauty and the Beast” occupied over its run 7,609,397 of those seats were occupied by audience members, resulting in an attendance rate of 86.15%⁴¹.

Conversely “Mary Poppins” run on Broadway ran at about half the amount of time as “Beauty and the Beast” at a strong seven years. During its run, it grossed a total of \$294,558,648 which gave the show a gross potential of 68.49%⁴² which as mentioned is good but does not even measure up close to Disney’s golden projects like “The Lion King” and “Aladdin”⁴³. Additionally out of the 4,757,163 seats available in the theater over the run, “Mary Poppins” brought in 3,877,521 audience members at a rate of 81.51%. You can see although the gross potential of this show is better than “Beauty and the Beast” it is because Disney sold more seats overall for “Beauty and the Beast”, but at a lesser price than “Mary Poppins”.

Figure 3: Gross Potential vs. Attendance Rate of Disney Shows

⁴⁰BroadwayWorld.com, and The Broadway League. The Little Mermaid Historical Grosses. 2009. Raw data. New York, New York.

<https://www.broadwayworld.com/grosses/THE-LITTLE-MERMAID>

⁴¹BroadwayWorld.com, and The Broadway League. Beauty and the Beast Historical Grosses. 2007. Raw data. New York, New York.

<https://www.broadwayworld.com/grossesshow.cfm?show=BEAUTY-AND-THE-BEAST&year=2007&allall=on>

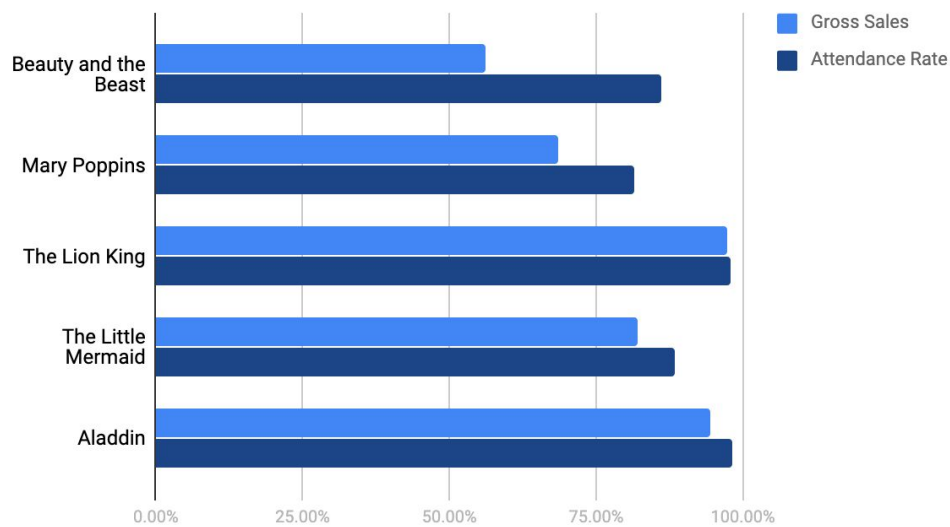
⁴²BroadwayWorld.com, and The Broadway League. Mary Poppins Historical Grosses. 2013. Raw data. New York, New York.

<https://www.broadwayworld.com/grossesshow.cfm?show=MARY-POPPINS&year=2013&allall=on>

⁴³BroadwayWorld.com, and The Broadway League. Aladdin Historical Grosses. 2019. Raw data. New York, New York.

<https://www.broadwayworld.com/grossesshow.cfm?show=ALADDIN&year=2019&allall=on>

Gross Potential vs. Attendance Rate



If trying to find out which show was more “successful” there is not a concrete answer. “Beauty and the Beast” ran for nearly double the time that “Mary Poppins” did which means there was an economic demand for the show to remain on Broadway. As far as seats sold “Beauty and the Beast” did better as a percentage, but “Mary Poppins” did better as far as gross potential. In the Broadway industry, the most common metric of success is gross potential. Going off of that, “Mary Poppins” reigns as the most successful show out of the two subjects.

Comparing the success of these shows and seeing one do better than the other leads to many possible conclusions as to why this is the case. A possibility as to why “Mary Poppins” did better is because of the ticket-buying audience discussed before more aligns with a liking towards “Mary Poppins” than “Beauty and the Beast”. There was also a larger gap of time (42 years) between Mary’s movie debut and her Broadway debut while there was only a three-year gap for “Beauty and the Beast”. The larger gap may trigger more

nostalgia and a stronger wanting to see a new version of the story on stage. Although this is difficult to prove, there also could be a difference in quality between the shows.

Additionally, Julie Andrews is in the original triggers more of an association with Broadway than any actor in “Beauty and the Beast” does.

Conclusion

Interestingly enough, two out of the three times, “Mary Poppins” has done better than “Beauty and the Beast”, one of Disney’s most popular and critically acclaimed products. It is easy to think that the more popular or more well known of two products is more successful, but when looking at the data, it does not reflect that. This research in the future could give a sneak peek into Disney’s success. With a robust upcoming schedule of Disney live-action remakes that were previously on Broadway, evaluating target audiences and box office success could predict and help analyze future sales and monetary success within Disney’s catalog of appealing titles.

Although this upcoming release schedule excites Disney super-fans it also issues a warning that not all remakes, for example, “Mary Poppins Returns”, will be quite as appealing. It raises questions of at what point of “failed” remakes will Disney throw the idea away and how will Disney keep these stories fresh and exciting in order to keep consumers interested. As far as their Broadway catalog, Disney follows a pretty rigid formula of creating content that did well as the movie box office while trying to recreate the story for the stage. Although this task proves difficult to keep Broadway audiences engaged because of their perception of Disney content, the box office receipts for Disney Theatrical Group speak for themselves.

This theme of revival also has implications on Disney's original content. With so much focus to be had on spending millions and millions of dollars on big remakes that may not guarantee impressive returns fans are worried that this focus will take away Disney's often innovative nature when it comes to the original content. It will be interesting to see what kind of content moves forward and is revived within Disney's catalog.

Appendix 1 - Disney and Burger King collaboration



Appendix 2 - DTG Interview Questions

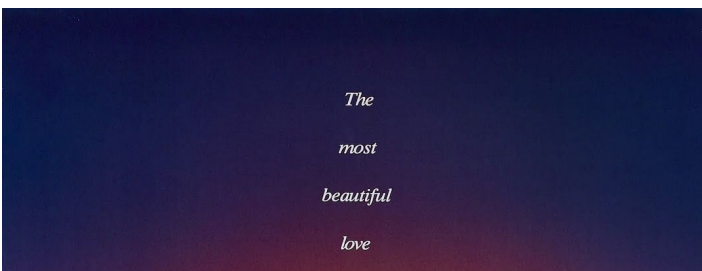
DTG INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are some differences between branding a Disney Broadway show versus a feature film and why?
2. How does the different target audience impact the tactics you use compared to the movie studios?
3. What are some perceptions that consumers come in with that are incorrect about DTG's shows and how can branding correct that?
4. What is the most important part of branding a show?
5. How do you get feedback on how the branding is working?

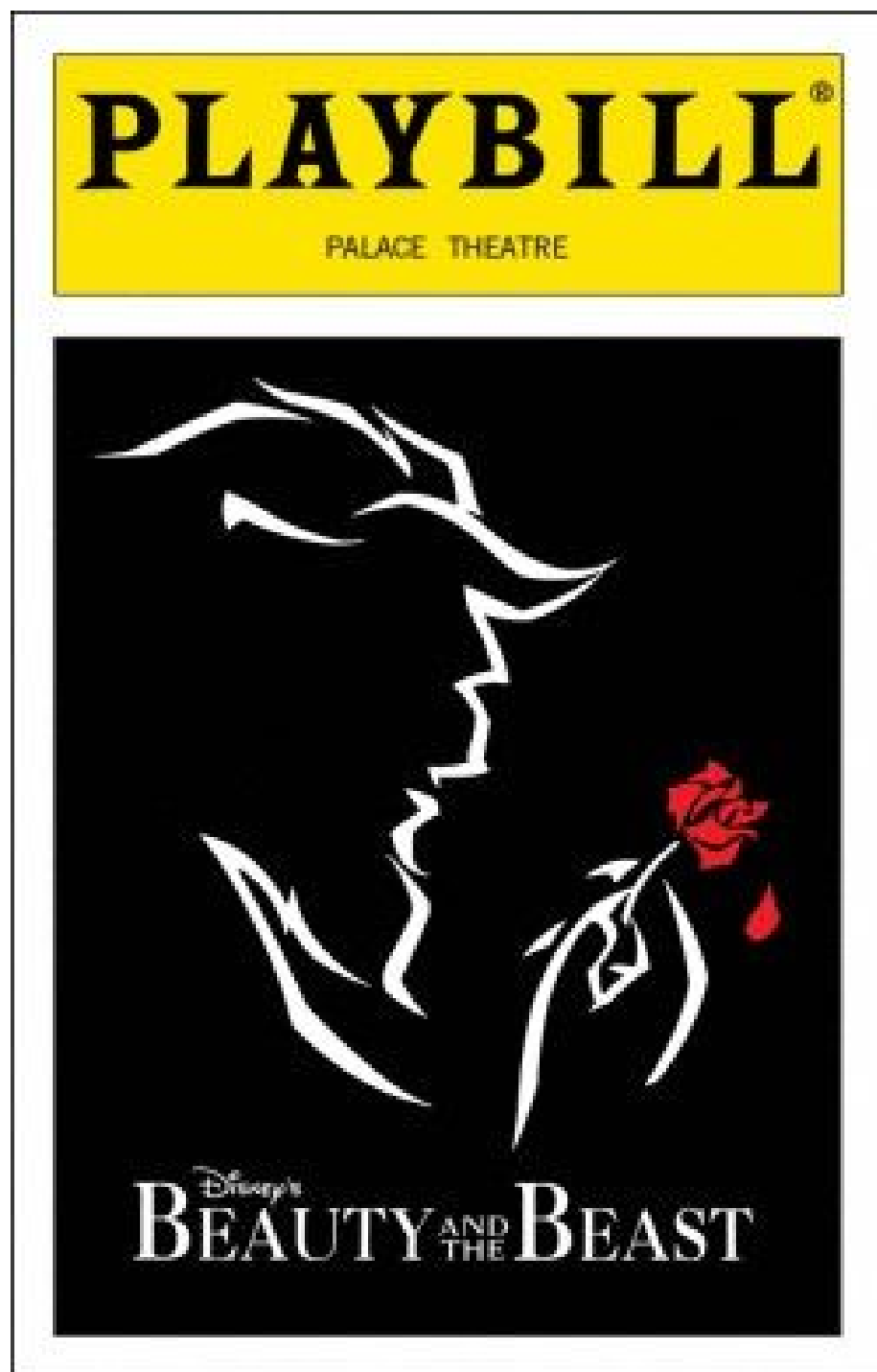
Appendix 3 - Advertisement from the original Mary Poppins film



Appendix 4 - Beauty and the Beast (1991) advertising



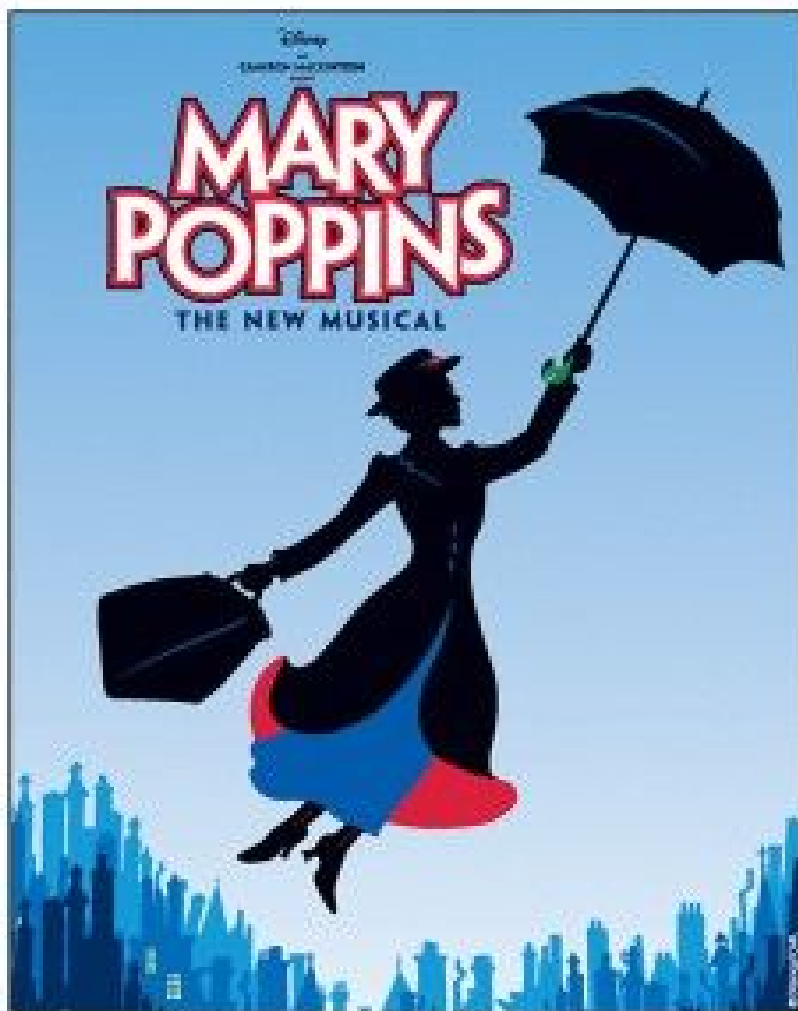
Appendix 5 - Beauty and the Beast Playbill



Appendix 6 - Mary Poppins playbill cover

SHOWBILL

NEW AMSTERDAM THEATRE



Appendix 7 - Beauty and the Beast (2017) movie poster



Appendix 8 - Mary Poppins Returns (2018) movie poster



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