



THE
TRANSFORM



*From teen queen
to leading lady,
from sitcom star
to serious actor—
and, yes, from
beauty to beast—
meet the stars
of CBS Films’
new **Beastly***

— BY JIM COLUCCI —

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PHOTO BY JOHN RUSSO

IT SEEMS LIKE A NO-BRAINER: *Beauty and the Beast* set in a high school. But much to the surprise—and delight—of CBS Films, the concept had never been done on the big screen before, and thus *Beastly*, starring Neil Patrick Harris, Vanessa Hudgens, Mary-Kate Olsen and newcomer Alex Pettyfer, which hits this March, was born.

Amy Baer, CBS film division’s president, calls adapting Alex Flinn’s young-adult novel for the big screen an “aha!” moment. “The themes of the classic story so closely match what high school is all about. Do people like you for who you are, or what you look like?”

After a worldwide search involving hundreds of actors, producers chose Pettyfer for the lead role of Kyle Kingson, a vain and arrogant high school senior at the center of the movie. The story’s sophisticated, decidedly un-Disney edge also attracted the cast of accomplished actors. To ensure that this wasn’t your average *Beast*, Baer brought in writer/director Daniel Barnz, whose résumé includes fairy-tale themes with indie film *Phoebe in Wonderland*.

NO FUR, NO CLAWS, NO PROBLEM

Early on, Baer and Barnz bonded over one somewhat radical idea: Unlike Ron Perlman’s character in the 1980s CBS cult classic *Beauty and the Beast*, this titular brute would have no fangs or fur. Instead, Barnz worked with special makeup designer Tony Gardner, and later with Pettyfer, to create a purely human *Beast* look that was more a physical manifestation of Kyle’s internal ugliness.

But such creativity would have its price—chiefly for the young actor. Pettyfer spent seven of the shoot’s nine weeks in makeup, kept out of public sight to keep his new look a shocking secret. Each day would begin with a call time 3½ hours earlier than anyone else’s so that more than 75 prosthetic pieces, including scars and shards of glass, could be applied. Then, after a 14-plus-hour shooting day, the actor would endure another hour in the chair to take it all off—only to face the whole process anew the next day.

THE BEAST AND THE BELLE

It takes a special skill set to play a cocky yet magnetic guy like Kyle, then switch over to

become an ostracized, angst-ridden Beast. “It’s an extraordinary arc for any actor—let alone a 19-year-old,” Barnz says. “But Alex has a real thoughtfulness and complexity to him.”

Pettyfer had appeared in a handful of movies in his native England and the sci-fi film *I Am Number Four*. But *Beastly* represented his first big break in America, and “the first piece of work that I’ve done that I am so proud of,” he says. From his first read of Barnz’s screenplay, “I had a real bond with Kyle, 15 pages into the script when he changes. Here was a guy who was struggling with his own identity, and I think every actor goes through that.”

As exciting as it was for Barnz to “discover” Pettyfer, it was equally rewarding “to help some-

one reinvent herself”—like Hudgens, whom he cast as *Beastly*’s heroine, Lindy. The then-20-year-old actress and singer, best known from Disney’s three *High School Musical* films, “is something of an icon of beauty for her audience. So I think for her to be a part of a film that says it’s not about what you look like on the outside is a really powerful thing.”

Embodying Lindy “was quite an intense experience,” Hudgens says. “*High School Musical* was intense in a physical way, but

this was so emotional and vulnerable, and took me to places I’ve never been before.”

And that’s exactly what the young actress managed to do as Kyle’s curse-breaking love. “I think Vanessa is going to surprise everybody,” Baer says. “This is a much deeper performance from her than people are used to seeing. This has a lot more edge, a lot more soul, and a lot more reality to it. Vanessa is grown up, a young woman now. And she brings a lot of maturity to this performance that I don’t think you’ve seen yet.”

THE ANTI-BARNEY

Harris saw *Beastly* as a chance to stretch some different dramatic muscles. His character, Will, is



a blind man who becomes Kyle’s mentor. Like Harris’ *How I Met Your Mother* character Barney Stinson, Will is nattily dressed and full of advice. But where Barney is “a frenetic presence, chock-full of Scotch and Red Bull, Will has to be much calmer and wiser,” Harris says. “He has to teach Kyle lessons without being so overt about it, to lead by example.”

Harris was able to research what life was like without sight thanks to O. Noir, a Montreal eatery staffed mostly with visually impaired servers who serve its meals in pitch darkness. To play Will without second-guessing his performance, Harris opted to wear opaque contact lenses, which rendered him truly blind. That’s when the fun began for the rest of the cast.

“When I was sitting in my chair between scenes and someone would come up and start talking, I would have no idea who it was,” Harris says. Pettyfer owns up to standing in front of his co-star, undetected, while making faces. Even Barnz admits to leading Harris around some cables on the set and “accidentally” marching him face first into a column. These unintended moments—and Harris’ witty ad-libs around them—ended up being included as comic relief for the film.

“I had only one scene with [Harris], who just cracks me up,” Hudgens remembers. “In every single take, he would do something different, and I had to keep trying to make myself not laugh.”

NOT YOUR DADDY’S TEEN ROMANCE

Pettyfer calculates that he went in and out of makeup 84 times—summed up, a week and a half in the makeup chair. “I lived in a hotel room on my own. Then we’d go to set, where everyone was told not to look at me or react,” Pettyfer says. “I began to look forward almost obsessively to doing my scenes with Vanessa, just to be around her and have conversation.”

But such solitude was worth it, he adds, in service of bringing universal themes about beauty and truth to the big screen. “In some ways, *Beastly* is a young romance—but it’s really not that at all,” he says. “It’s a story known to everyone, this time told through the Beast’s eyes. You can call that ‘teenage’ if you want, but I hope all types of people go to see it. Because this is a story for everyone.”

Neil Patrick Harris of *How I Met Your Mother* plays a blind mentor to the transformed Beast.

