

Review of Ozark Actors Theatre's
Into the Woods
By John Woodfin
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Into the Woods is Enchanting

"Into the Woods," a musical fairy-tale by Broadway's dynamic duo, James Lapine and Stephen Sondheim is a "must see" as Ozark Actors Theatre wraps up their season with this most frequently produced Sondheim work.

A wonderful ensemble piece with great music and a delightfully charming story about many of your favorite fairy-tale characters, including Cinderella, Jack, Little Red Riding Hood, the Wolf, Rapunzel and of course a handsome Prince or two.

The story begins, as per usual, once upon a time, in a Kingdom faraway, as a Baker and his Wife learn that they have been cursed by the gnarled, old Witch next door and will remain forever childless unless they can break the curse by collecting a variety of special objects such as a cow as white as milk, a cape as red as blood, hair as yellow as corn, a slipper as pure as gold..... Well, you can see where this is leading! Nearly all of our favorite fairy-tale characters become involved as the story unfolds.

As always, there is a moral to be learned in this fairy tale for adults. Actions affect others and always have consequences. We also learn that in order to survive, the community must come together and act responsibly. Sondheim ends the show with a reprise of "Into the Woods," and sets forth the central lesson to be learned.

YOU JUST CAN'T ACT

YOU HAVE TO LISTEN
YOU CAN'T JUST ACT
YOU HAVE TO THINK.

Director Jason Cannon, musical director Dave Maglione, a cast of seventeen talented actors, along with a staff of imaginative designers and technicians, create an enchanting evening of musical theatre. It must be said however, that while the audience may get swept away in pursuit of “light” entertainment, Lapine’s book and Sondheim’s music teach some serious life lessons. Many of the characters are somewhat enigmatic. It is not always easy to tell the good guys from the bad guys and double standards are found throughout. The point is that “Into the Woods,” is not just a “fluff” musical but explores themes that give the audience plenty to think about as they leave the theatre. It also provides a very hummable score. If you aren’t whistling one of the songs from the show as you drive home, I’ll be surprised.

One of the most impressive qualities of this show is that the cast is one of the tightest ensembles in OAT history. It would be difficult to isolate one performance as most outstanding and with a cast of 18 it would be difficult to comment on each performance. That being said, Blane Pressler and Brittany Proia are exceptionally wonderful as the Baker and his Wife. I have come to expect no less from Blane Pressler and OAT is fortunate indeed to have a talented performer like Brittany Proia in one of the lead roles. It is also terrific to see Michael Detmer (Jack) and Gregory Cuellar (Wolf/Cinderella’s Prince) return to the OAT stage again this summer along with the expressive Sabra Sellers (Cinderella). These young performers bring such energy and enthusiasm to their performances. It is always a pleasure to watch them onstage. Natalie Sannes (Little Red) and Kelly Campbell (the Witch) also deserve recognition for their outstanding performances.

Our local actors certainly keep in step with the Equity actors. If

one didn't have a program in hand, it would be difficult for a new audience member to know who is professional and who is not. I loved watching Amy Arthur's performance as Granny. I won't give away how she makes her entrance but it was hysterical. Amy Arthur and Laura Light were two of my student-actors at Rolla High School and it is always a pleasure to watch them perform. They are both a joy onstage and off. As I said, this is a tight ensemble giving inspiring performances.

Scenic and Lighting Designer, Kevin Shaw has created an impressive set for this production. As we all know, most good fairy-tales take place in the woods. A dark, deep forest where unusual and fantastical characters live. The set is beautiful and filled with mood and magic. This scenic design provides a perfect place in which the story can be told and Mr. Shaw's lighting brings it to life. As the curtain opens, you are transported to another place and time where anything can and will happen

Laura Cook's costumes are magnificent and just what you'd expect these storybook characters to wear.

Stephen Sondheim's music is always beautiful and always a challenge. Kudos to Dave Maglione for his part in helping the actor/singers master this score.

Recognition must be given to Director, Jason Cannon. Jason's work is outstanding as usual. After directing the summer's earlier plays and acting in one of them, one would think that Jason would be exhausted. I believe, however, that Jason draws energy from his work. It is an obvious passion and I believe his efforts and talent has brought OAT to an even higher level of professionalism.

Jason told me that this was a special cast and that they were going to give a "Wow!" performance. He was right. If you'd like to experience the "Wow!" factor, then be sure to get your tickets as

soon as possible for this theatre masterpiece and this production that is masterful.

“Into the Woods,” runs through Sunday August 11. For ticket information go to ozarkactorstheatre.org or call 573-364-9523. THE BOX OFFICE IS OPEN: 1-5pm Mon-Fri, also 2 hours prior to every performance but closed during matinees.