

Into the Woods Review

Stray from the path to Maumee and get thankfully lost in The Waterville Playshop's enchanting, enjoyable production of *Into the Woods*.

Into the Woods is a delightfully witty and moving reshaping of some favorite fairy tales, expanded into a parable about the darkness that often shadows life. It's a daunting prospect, with a cast of 20, multiple sets and a structure that's really two musicals in one.

The first act, running about 90 minutes, is a clever intertwining of familiar tales (mainly Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstalk, Little Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel) and one invented to tie them together (The Baker and His Wife), culminating in happy ever after. The second, shorter and terser, is a dark unraveling, bringing the few survivors to an ending more Grimm than happy. Not an easy task.

Waterville Playshop's rendition, brightly directed by Joel Logsdon, and assisted by Sarah Pettee, emphasizes the comedic and slightly ridiculous aspects of the Stephen Sondheim-James Lapine musical about what happens in a storybook kingdom after "happily ever after." From the moment it began, this company displayed love, passion, dedication, and discipline. They were on top of this challenging score and played their parts with depth, nuance, and sharp comic timing.

The Maumee Indoor Theatre has been transformed into a dark wood, dripping with moss, snaky tree branches, a tower that doubles as a huge tree, a nicely spooky setting for a tale about the fallout from wishes coming true. A poor Baker (Jeffery Beam) and his Wife (Sarah Nowak) will do anything for a child; even submit to the bizarre conditions demanded from a vengeful Witch (Kimberly Manchur), who has secret motives as well.

The Baker and his Wife must secure a cow, owned by Jack (Jonathan Crawford) of "The Beanstalk" fame; Little Red Riding Hood's (Emma Rabuano) crimson cape, and Cinderella's (Sarah Rohen) golden slipper.

Their zealous pursuit of these items clashes and tangles with the wishes of the other characters, which are deep in the woods and also in pursuit of something or other. For instance, Rapunzel's Prince (Colin Commager) and Cinderella's Prince (Matt Richardson), are there purely for the thrill of the chase, as seen in their tribute to narcissism, "Agony."

Cinderella's stepsisters (Sarah Dysard & Joelle Stiles) try to fit into the discarded slipper, with some help from their mother (Sara Ledzianowski). This comic trio more than once has the audience eating out of their hands. They deftly capture the black comedy of the toe-cutting scene without it being just gross. And the audience feels for them as they stumble about in black glasses after being blinded.

Cinderella wishes to be rescued from drudgery, but finds that she is ambivalent once her Prince is in hot pursuit—her conflicted feelings expressed with sparkle by Rohen, who deftly handles the intricate wordplay of “On the Steps of the Palace” and “A Very Nice Prince.”

The simple-minded Jack wants friends, to be understood and appreciated for who he is and Crawford captures the poignant wistfulness of his yearnings in the song “Giants in the Sky.” A fellow young person, the sweet-toothed Red Riding Hood, is not so head-in-the-clouds. Her encounter with a predatory Wolf (Matt Richardson) turns her into a knife-wielding ninja who experiences the thrill of being scared and uses it to her advantage. Rabuano is hilarious, belting out “I Know Things Now” with sharp edged wit and vocal power.

Central characters the Baker and his wife are beautifully played by Beam and Nowak, who imbue the songs “It Takes Two” and “Moments in the Woods” with emotional impact. Kimberly Manchur’s powerhouse voice gives command to the role of the Witch, who reveals her vulnerabilities and fear of being alone in “Stay with Me” and her ferocious side in the tumultuous “Last Midnight.”

The engaging delight of Waterville Playshop’s staging brings out the whimsy and good humor of the musical, especially in the treatment of Sondheim’s witty rhymes and twisty cadences. You get the sophistication of Sondheim’s compositions and lyrics straightforwardly and full of nuance.

Into the Woods. Music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim. Book by James Lapine . Directed by Joel Logsdon, Assistant Director: Sarah Pettee, Featuring Guy Zimmerman, Jeffery Beam, Sarah Nowak, Kimberly Manchur, Sarah Rohan, Emma Rabuano, Jonathan Crawford, Ann Weis, Abby Stoffel, Matt Richardson, Colin Commager, Sara Ledzianowski, Ron Matanick, Sarah Steirman, Sarah Dysard, Joelle Stiles, Matt Brangham, Sharon Esper, Courtney Gilliland, and Claudia Cromly

Music Director: Matt Zwyer. Producers: Tammy Fitch and Mark Pike. Scenic Designers: Mark Pike, David Fitch, Joel Logsdon . Light Designer: Ian Hayward . Costumes: 3B Productions . Sound Designer: Tom Gray . Stage Managers: Tammy Fitch, Mark Pike . Produced by Waterville Playshop

Pamela Tomassetti is delighted to be reviewing **The Waterville Playshop** production of ***Into the Woods***. Pamela began her professional career in San Diego as Snow White and the understudy to Cinderella in the world premiere of ***Into the Woods*** at the **Old Globe Theatre** under the direction of Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine. Recent credits include performances with Broadway Confidential and The Glaciy Theatre Collective. Pam earned her MFA in Acting at The Catholic University of America in Washington DC and is a member of Actors Equity.