

Ohio Light Opera:
Into the Woods (June 27)

by Kelly Ferjutz
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There's a wise old saying: be careful what you wish for — you might just get it. And if that happens, then what do you do? That could well be the theme of *Into the Woods*, now in rep at Ohio Light Opera through August 9.

Once upon a time, Stephen Sondheim wrote lyrics for music that had been composed by others: among them were the classics *West Side Story* and *Gypsy*. At some point, he must have realized that writing the music might be more fun. So, he started composing his own songs, and used words written by others. But who's to say he didn't help with those, too? (He also wrote the words for several of his own musicals.)



With *Into the Woods*, Sondheim came up with a Broadway musical that combines a batch of grown-up versions of fairy tales. The four stories he and James Lapine brought together under one umbrella are “Cinderella,” “Jack and the Beanstalk,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” and “Rapunzel,” plus the previously unknown story of a baker and his wife who long to have a family of their own.

During the first act, we meet all of the main characters, along with their companions. Cinderella (Hilary Koolhaven), of course, has a wicked step-mother (Jocelyn Hansen) and two step-sisters (Abby Kurth and Joelle Lachance). Jack (Spencer Reese) has a mother — and what a mother she is! Julie Wright Costa puts great exuberance into her role as she pushes Jack out to explore the world, then reels him back in again, along with his cow.



Sadie Spivey is terrific both vocally and visually as Little Red Riding Hood, while Michelle Pedersen is convincing in her minor role as Granny. The wolf? Well, he's a different type of wolf than we're accustomed to seeing, but Brad Baron has fun with it all as he tries to capture Red.



Rapunzel, for some reason, isn't a major factor, although Ivana Martinic is more than capable. At least her story provides great scenery-chewing options for the witch, and Yvonne Trobe takes advantage of every bite! Rapunzel's Prince is Aidan Smerud, while Cinderella's Prince is Benjamin Dutton, and the Steward is Garrett Medlock. Making brief appearances at the very end are Elizabeth Perkins as Snow White (minus dwarves) and Kelly Curtin as Sleeping Beauty.

The glue that holds all these stories together (a mixture of flour and water?) is provided by the baker (Jacob Allen) and his wife (Sarah Best). They're a very normal, almost

ordinary couple who just happen to live in the woods. The only blight on the horizon is their lack of children, and once the witch hears that, look out!



The witch devises a plan whereby the baker must finagle something of value from Cinderella, Jack, Red Riding Hood, and Rapunzel. If he is successful, and brings her their treasures, she will provide a baby.

The first act tells this larger story, wound around and through the familiar fairy tales. It's bright and colorful, with great songs and singing. The second act demonstrates how easily everything can fall apart once you have what you thought you wanted.

Jack has slain the giant, whose widow, the Giantess (Elizabeth Pedersen), demands Jack's life in exchange. Some of the forest's inhabitants are in favor of turning him over, but others resist, with varying degrees of

success. All of them lose something of personal value along the way.

Nothing is as it seems, however, and when the two princes (Cinderella's and Rapunzel's) reprise the first act's "Agony," it's all too believable. The Narrator and Mysterious Man are neatly delineated by the energetic and bouncy Ted Christopher. You'll think he has springs attached to the bottom of his shoes to go with his rubbery, very expressive face.

Stage director Steven Daigle keeps a brisk pace throughout, while still allowing breathing space between the vignettes, so one is never confused by what is happening.

His very capable collaborator, conductor J. Lynn Thompson, shepherded the OLO orchestra through the various demands made by the complex score.



The awesome set by Danial Hobbs includes huge drops with multi-storied trees spaced evenly across the stage and a stepped platform at center front. Anne Medlock's costumes are mostly bright-colored and beautiful, especially the various ball gowns, all of which get very hard usage. Lighting is by Brittany Shemuga and sound by Christopher Plummer. Choreographer is Spencer Reese.

Into the Woods runs in repertoire through August 9 at Freedlander Theatre on the campus of the College of Wooster. Tickets are available [online](#).

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