

St. Dunstan's Theatre Guild of Cranbrook presents "Into the Woods" 8:30 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, June 11-13 in the Outdoor Greek Theatre, 400 Lone Pine Road, Bloomfield Hills. General Admission \$12, Seniors and Students \$12. Call (248) 644-0527. BY MARY JANE DOERR SPECIAL WRITER

Anyone who has ever wondered what "And they live happily ever after" means in fairy-tale land, must take a romp in Cranbrook Woods to see St. Dunstan's Theatre Guild venture into the land of imagination. On the Greek stage, they have mounted a sprightly and enjoyable version of Stephen Sondheim's "Into the Woods" that really takes you into the woods.

And there, underneath that clouded sky, is a hint of a suggestion that Jack (John W. Rutherford) may be right when he sings "Giants in the Sky."

In reality, this open-air, wooded setting fits this contemporary "behind the scenes" look at what really happens in those glib fairy-tales and nursery rhymes that date back in time almost to the era of the theater style itself. While the setting presented Music Director Margery Brooks and Director Amy Lynn Smith with some additional challenges, Smith creatively turned these surroundings into scenes from the show.

The audience finds themselves seated "On The Steps of the Palace," on Prince Charming's steps, and around Ann DeMay's

colorful storybook sets. A particularly strong 20 member cast humorously acted out the heretically ever after version of the Baker's Wife, Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstalk, and Rapunzel.

Sondheim does not compose at the piano so his music is in his words, something the St. Dunstan's captured with strong "praiseworthy" diction. Clearly the jokes come across from the body microphones when the microphones weren't playing tricks on the speakers.

This speak-sing Sondheim quality doesn't allow outstanding voices like Peggy Lee's to resonate when she sings the role of Little Red Riding Hood, but the show still demands a host of quality voices.

Jamie Richards as the Baker, John W. Rutherford as Jack, Nicki Stacey as the Baker's Wife, Marrie H. Diehm as Cinderella, Kendall White as the Witch, Joshua S. Dawson as Rapunzel's Prince and Chris Steinmayer as the Wolf and Cinderella's Prince all have that essence of quality. Even though Elizabeth Robinson never sings much but "Ah's as Rapunzel, she does it well.

A dramatic Keith Lepard narrators this ensemble work where there seems to be as many leads as there are stars in the sky. The story opens with a wish list, Cinderella wishes to go to the ball, the Baker and his wife wish for a child, and Jack's Mother (Kappy Pennington) wishes for cow that gives milk.

The cast has captured the personalities of the characters. Diehm is a warm-hearted Cinderella. Stacey personifies "the end justified the means" philosophy as the Baker's wife. Rutherford is funny as the dim-witted Jack. Lee is articulate and cute as the Little Red Ridinghood.

The jesting trio Kimberly Parlove, Margaret Callaghan, and Jan Casi add significantly to the show as the Stepmother and her two daughters. Ironically, Steinmayer is just as slimy a Wolf as he is insincere as Prince Charming. A commanding Kendall White throws more than her pointed nails around as The Witch.

It is hard to know which witch is which, as the story unfolds in the unnarrated, ominous Act 2. Each of the characters had resorted to harming the others in the pursuit of their own ends. Everyone loses what they long in the process of "Agency" and learns that sometimes witches can be right and giants can be good. Richards is wonderful in his climatic "No More" as the Baker.

While there are no falling trees in this set, the wolf is fully clad, and the Prince has no gellop. Smith has given us a post-Simpson version of Sondheim where "the bloody shoe fits like a glove." In this land of wolves and witches, St. Dunstan's has come up with a distinctive show where the end really does justify the means.

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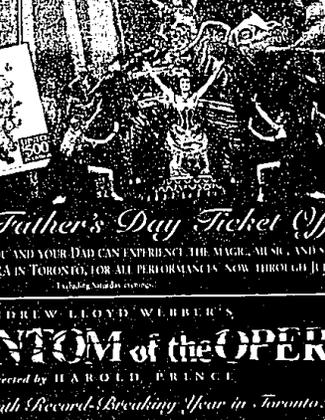
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