

# Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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(OTC)

## Franklin actor is prince of a fellow

"Into the Woods" opens Tuesday and continues through Sunday, May 21, at the Fox Theatre in Detroit. Ticket prices range from \$15 to \$29.50, depending upon performance. Tickets are available at the Fox Theatre box office, Joe Louis Arena box office and all Ticketmaster outlets. To charge tickets by phone call 645-6666.

By Victor E. Swanson  
special writer

**N**OT TOO LONG ago, it was a dream that the Fox Theatre in Detroit would be revived and made into a great showplace again. Someone wished extra hard, as a character might in a fairy tale, and the dream became a reality.

Now dreams — actually, fairy tales — invade the reality of the Fox again, in the form of the Stephen Sondheim musical "Into the Woods."

"Be careful what you wish, you may get it!" said actor Douglas Sills about the main theme of the play in a telephone interview from Miami last week, where the play was being performed before going to Atlanta and Detroit. Sills, a native of Farmington, plays Rapunzel's prince in "Into the Woods."

He said, "Into the Woods" deals with the fairy tales we all grew up with, predominantly relying on the Grimm's fairy tales... Little Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel and her prince, Cinderella. And then one other fairy tale that the writers created to tie them all together — the Baker and the Baker's wife. These several fairy tales are intertwined together, and presented in their original fashion in the first act.

"AND THEN in the second act, a big change, and the story becomes about what happens once these characters get their wishes."

For instance, the second act looks at what happens when the Baker and his wife get the child that they've always wished for.

"It's exciting and very fast-paced — the beginning, the first half particularly," Sills exclaimed.

Then he became more serious about the work. "The second half becomes... more introspective and somewhat darker, as Stephen Sondheim tends to be."

Despite the "somewhat darker" feel of the second act, Sills added,



The musical "Into the Woods," opening Tuesday at Detroit's Fox Theatre, features Sills in the role of Rapunzel's Prince.

"But (it's) a lot of fun and can be enjoyed on many different levels. And many young children come to the show — 3, 9 and 10 years old. And a lot of adults!"

"Into the Woods" stars Cleo Laine, who plays the witch, and a good cast of performers, such as Mary Gordon Murray, who for much of the 1980s played Becky Buchanan on "One Life to Live."

"I think Cleo Laine is a great witch," said Sills, with conviction. "And talking about Detroit-area audiences, he remarked, 'I think they'll be fascinated by the richness... she brings to this character.'"

**L**AINE PORTRAYS the character that Bernadette Peters originated on Broadway several years ago. Performances Laine does at the Fox will be the last for her with this company, which is the first national touring company to perform "Into the Woods." Cast member Ray Gill also will leave the production when it de-

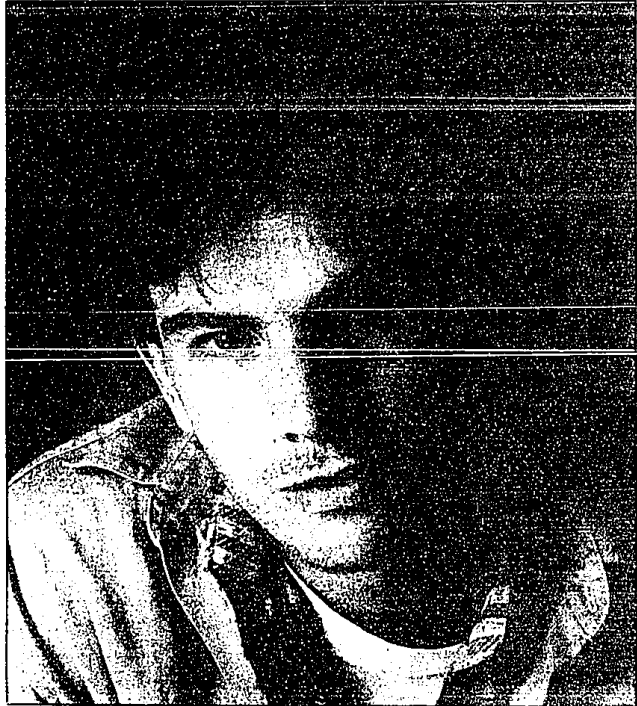
parts from Detroit for New Haven, Conn.

Staying with the show is Chuck Wagner, who created the Sills role on Broadway and now plays Cinderella's prince, the older brother of Rapunzel's prince.

Sills and Wagner's characters have a strong sibling rivalry going. Sills sees his character as "trying to overcome a basic insecurity about being second, always second, and watching his brother, seeing what he does and trying to better him at that... And his fundamental goal is finding a maiden he can call his own and stay with the rest of his life."

His character is "enjoying the agony of pursuing something that's always just out of reach."

Sills won't be able to play the prince in the soon-to-be-taped production of "Into the Woods" for PBS. The original Broadway cast will gather together in New York for the taping. While that's happening, Sills will take over the role of Cinderella's



Douglas Sills now makes his home in Los Angeles, but the actor was raised in Franklin and went to school there and at Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills.

laine's prince in the touring company for a short while.

Sills is based in Los Angeles, where he auditioned late last year for his role of the prince. He moved to L.A. after doing a few years of graduate study at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco.

**G**ROWING UP in the Birmingham-Bloomfield area in the 1970s, Sills attended Franklin Village elementary school, performed for the Franklin Village Players and attended Cranbrook Schools for grades 7-12. He also spent many summers at a camp near Kalkaska, which was run by a local attorney, Bernie Friedman.

"My brother and sister went to camp there. And there was a lot of performing going on there... and I got a kick out of it, and I got a lot of praise for it. I think that's what pushed me along the way," Sills said. Before getting a bachelor of arts degree at the University of Michi-

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— Douglas Sills

gan, he took a term off and spent about five months looking for acting work in New York.

"I went to every audition I could get in, not being a union member. And I learned what I needed to learn and how I fit in and what I wanted to do," he said.

In December 1982, Sills received his degree from the U.M., set on doing serious drama, such as "The Three Sisters," which he performed in on campus. Other shows he appeared in professionally or as a student at U-M or ACT were "Sunday in the Park with George," "What the Butler Saw," "Dames at Sea" and "Isn't It Romantic."

**L**AST MAY he was seen as David Porter in the George C. Scott-Molly Hagan pilot TV-movie "Justin Case" for the "The Disney Sunday Movie" on ABC. Viewers may see him in the coming months in an episode of "The Cavanaugh" with Bernard Hughes on CBS, made last year before starting out on the tour of "Into the Woods."

Sills hopes to be in California in January for what he called "the pilot season," when all the pilot TV shows are cast and produced. For a while longer, he is happy to be in "Into the Wood," which he described as "the cutting edge of what musical theater is evolving toward."

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