

## THEATER

# Follow the Ridgedale Players 'Into the Woods'

"*Into the Woods*" will be presented Fridays, May 7, 14 and 21, Saturdays, May 8, 15 and 22, and Sundays May 16 and 23 at the Ridgedale Players theater, 205 W. Long Lake Troy. Curtain time is 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 3 p.m. Sundays. Adult tickets cost \$13. Senior and student Sunday tickets are \$12. To order tickets, call (248) 988-7049.

BY HELEN ZUCKER

SPECIAL WRITER

The Ridgedale Players' production of Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's "*Into the Woods*," directed by Susan Skibici and Laura Kerr, is wonderful. The cast of 16 actors interacts with speed and a rich sense of the play's poignant, wry intelligence.

Nancy Jeanne Potts bubbles with life as The Witch, who locks her daughter, Rapunzel, in a tower for 14 years. Wishing to protect her golden-haired daughter from the world, Potts is very strong. She sets the plot going by promising the baker and his wife a child if they bring her by midnight a milk-white cow, a blood-red cape, a golden slipper and blond tresses. Potts and Amanda Bayly (Rapunzel) do a moving rendition of "Stay With Me," and Potts is one tough lady in "Last

Midnight."

Jim West does a great job as the Narrator, who weaves the familiar fairy tales — Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstalk, and the Baker and the Baker's Wife. Little Red Riding Hood and Rapunzel — into a fantasy that involves them all, and, in Act II, undercuts the happy endings with twists of fate we all recognize. The Narrator (the one who "gives direction") disappears in Act II, and West becomes The Mysterious Man in the Woods, a necessary figure.

Suzette Shuller brings a neat comic touch to "A Very Nice Prince," and gentleness to the lovely song "No One is Along." Shuller's voice has range, and this musical gives her the chance to use it. Dan Fuller is stalwart and hilarious as Cinderella's Prince.

Fuller strikes just the right attitude and is especially good in his love scene with the baker's wife and doubling as The Wolf, singing a sexy rendition of "Hello, Little Girl." But Fuller is at his best in his duet with his brother, Rapunzel's puzzled Prince, played by Eric Henrickson. "Agony," a song about how delicious it is to want what you

can't have (like "Sleeping Beauty"), is one of the best songs in the show. Fuller and Henrickson do it justice.

Gwen Elbert is fine as Jack's ricketty, loving mother. Tom Peterson is full of bounce, heart-willingness, anything but high intelligence as Jack, the plucky fellow who climbs the beanstalk and brings down a goose that lays golden eggs, a harp and a giant whose wife later lays waste to the community. Tania Vellincky is a spirited, funny Little Red Riding Hood. She has voice.

In a show filled with fine performances, Carl Jones and Holly G. Hellstein stand out; they're terrific as the baker and his wife who get their child and then lose their way. They get to ask a lot of questions, along with The Witch, Rapunzel, and Cinderella. When Cinderella tells The Prince "My father's house was a nightmare; yours was a dream. Now I want something in-between" as she holds the baker's son, she means she wants what the baker and his wife had. Jones and Hellstein give us the married state in all its bliss and annoyance.

Eugenia Garner, Conny Cratch and Carla Peterson give us Cinderella's selfish, pretentious fam-



Musical: Holly Hellstein (left, the Baker's Wife) and Carl Jones (the Baker) are terrorized by Nancy Potts, who plays the witch in "Into the Woods."

SELMA COOPER

ily — in spades. Diane Dillard as Cinderella's dead mother who shows up from time to time in a litigant window in a tree, as Granny who makes a fur coat out of The Wolf, and as the Giant, is equally good at being sweet, loud and nasty. Stan Iobst is a dutiful Steward.

Kerry Price's musical direction/piano and Valerie Mould's choreography show flashes of energy. So did the set by Lobst, Tom Coffe, Sonja Milton and crew. The costumer, by Michael A. Gravame, Shirley Fager and lots of seamstresses were marvelous. So were the

props by Laura Kerr, sound by Thom Griffen, make-up by Julie Fuller and lights by Bob Garner. Carl Stewart played percussion. Kathy Oliphant, flute; Alan Oliphant, trumpet; and Eleanor Struble, bass.

I loved the cow.

## Talented youngsters making dreams come true

Maybe it happened during a flurry of spring cleaning or even a frantic ransacking of your home in search of an old-time friend. In the shoebox of life's most important clutter, sometimes tucked into a creative relic from our teenage

years. Whether it's a poem or song, an experimental project for art class, or a love letter, the free flow of ideas and passion with which we expressed our dreams then can often trigger an emotional response now. Given our life experiences, we might be able to refine the same work if we were doing it today, but it would be hard to match the unfiltered thrill of our original effort.

This week on Backstage Pass on Detroit Public Television, you'll meet some talented young artists whose shoeboxes are overflowing with dreams, some of which have already been realized.

What a month it has been for the young performers of Detroit's Mosaic Youth Theatre! Fresh

from their April performances at New York's Kennedy Performing Arts Center and the White House, the organization's new production, "Everybody's Talkin,'" begins a four-day engagement at the Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts on Thursday, May 13.

This original musical play is an adaptation of Shakespeare's comedy, "Much Ado About Nothing," done in Motown style with singers, rappers, comics and dance.

"Just walking into the Kennedy Center was an incredibly thrilling experience, and the challenge for our cast was to keep the awe in check and remember that theatre is theatre and music is music, no matter where you're performing and who's in the audience," said Artistic Director Rick Sperling.

"There's a concern that kids

don't dream as big as they did in the past. Experiences like these help them realize they can expand their horizons," he adds.

The Mosaic Youth Theatre has

demonstrated that its work is

worthy of a national stage, and the dream of becoming the first nationally touring youth theatre is something that can be achieved.

Few schools in America can

match the creative legacy of

Detroit's Cass Technical High

School, and the perennial sprouting of talent has produced a bumper crop of dreams this year. The gifted members of the drama department will perform in the first new production of Moengen Ngema's "Sarafina" in over ten years, May 12-13 at the Southfield Center for the Arts and May 19-21 at Cass Tech.

Ngema made an exception to his no-hedging decision not to release the rights to "Sarafina" when he heard that the students will represent the United States in the Fringe Festival in Scotland this August. He not only believes in the ability of the group to tell his story as it should be told, but, obviously, in the power and potential of dreams.

Cranbrook Academy of Arts is another place to see who's up and coming on the arts scene. The 1999 Graduate Degree Show, going on through May 14, presents the work of over 60 young artists, architects and designers.

When established music artists reflect on their careers, they often choose their earliest recordings as their favorites. Many times, their long-time fans agree. With experience came polish, and likely, greater commercial success. But, by catching a band in its infancy, you're treated to all the energy and

complexities that come with youth. Members of the power-pop band the Sights were born in the eighties, have rocked through much of the nineties, and have unlimited promise for the new century.

On the next edition of BACKSTAGE PASS, airing Sunday, May 9 at 7:30 p.m. on Detroit Public Television, you'll see and hear the Sights, visit Cran-

brook's Graduation Show, and sample the theatrical work of young talent at the Mosaic Youth Theatre and Cass Tech.

If you've temporarily lost touch

with the way you used to dream and create as a kid, with apologies to the late Ed Sullivan, we've got a really big shoebox for you.

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