

## **BRIDGES MUSICAL THEATRE**

### **‘INTO THE WOODS’ - JULY 2025**

Stephen Sondheim’s musicals are demanding and probably ‘ITW’ is the most challenging of them all. Unless one is an aficionado of Sondheim it is not easy listening and although I have seen the show five times I still struggle to find any tune that is melodic or predictable in its resolve. It can be testing for the audience as well as for the cast, however I do appreciate that for some people that is exactly what makes his music so intriguing.

The musical opened at The Phoenix Theatre in London in 1990 and ran for 186 performances. A number of Grimm’s Fairy Tales are woven together and in the story telling the moral becomes clear: it’s not always best to get the thing you wish for most!

The opening scene was super and the stage filled with the numerous, beautifully costumed characters from the Grimm’s Fairy Tales which were about to unfold in the couple of hours ahead. The gauze drapes on each side of the stage gave a ‘fairy tale’ feel to the set, which was good and the properties/furniture were suitable. The stories enacted were not the more innocent, happy ones that we read to small children but instead they high-light the macabre undertone of each tale.

There are 19 musical numbers in the first act which means that there is very little dialogue and when there is then even that is underscored. It’s important to hear the dialogue and some of the music was too loud to be able to discern the spoken words - particularly from Red Riding Hood. In that role Nina McPhillips’s acting was very good and she looked the part. The scene when she is eaten by the wolf was brilliantly done. Lucy Curtis gave a superb performance in the role of Cinderella. Her singing voice is a joy to hear and ‘No One is Alone’ was especially good (and even tuneful!)

Blake Mc Phillips played the rather dozy Jack very well and as his poor exasperated Mother Gail was convincing.

The show was almost stolen by Milky White who was brilliantly ‘operated’ by James Hanley. Her movements and imagined ‘expressions’ (by the tilt of her head etc) were priceless. He did an amazing job in really bringing her to life.

Rob Franck and Chris Best were both confident and impressive as the Baker and his wife – large parts and they were in very safe hands. ‘Moments in The Woods’ was notable.

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Florinda, Lucinda and their mother were played enthusiastically by Jo Hayes, Charlotte Benton and Jo Conlan respectively. The three ladies looked as though they were very much enjoying their characters as they flounced around the stage in their striking costumes and struggled to make the slipper fit by trying a bit of DIY surgery!

The tales were told by the two narrators and in those roles Megan Rogerson and Kelaine Blades spoke clearly and worked as one.

I enjoyed the rendition of 'Agony' by Dan Curtis (Rapunzel's Prince) and Wesley Wooden (Cinderella's Prince). They brought out the comedy in the song with Wesley's posturing and drama and Dan a quite different character - they were a good foil for one another.

Emma Hounsell was evil and scary as the witch and then transformed into benevolent character of pleasant appearance. It was hard to believe they were the same person!

There were quite a number of smaller supporting roles and the cast played them well. I particularly liked the ladies who were birds (amongst other things) their movements were so realistic.

Act One ends on a very happy note, all the desires of the characters have been met, but then in Act Two it starts to fall apart when the Giant from Jack's beanstalk comes onto the scene. The consequences of their actions haunt them and they have to work together to save themselves and their Kingdom. Sacrifices are made.

The projections were excellent and appeared to move from one to another seamlessly and the lighting plot was first rate enhancing each new setting to perfection.

The cast and crew dealt with scenery changes quickly and quietly.

Karen Hanley's vision for this production was most impressive and her direction was first-rate.

Musical Director Guy Bunce had an enormous amount of difficult music to teach the cast and he had done an excellent job with them - for me a little less volume for the performance would have made it easier to hear some of the soloists.

Your programme is attractive and I liked the fact that everyone in the show had a photograph in the programme – most appropriate in a production where every single person had a part to play and each contributed to the whole piece. The white on navy print makes for easy reading and the programme was nicely set out.

Thank you for inviting me to see 'Into The Woods' - which does become a little more familiar the more I see it – and for your excellent hospitality on the evening.

Have a good Summer and I shall look forward to seeing you all again for 'The Wizard of Oz' in December.

E. Gloria Smith.

NODA SE Regional Representative – District 12