

Into the Woods Director's Note

Into the Woods first premiered on Broadway in 1987. With a book and original direction by James Lapine as well as music and lyrics by the incomparable Stephen Sondheim, the show won Tony Awards for Best Score, Book, and Actress (for Joanna Gleason, the original Baker's Wife). Had the show not premiered the same year as *The Phantom of the Opera*, it would likely be even more decorated, but remains one of the most popular Sondheim shows of all time. And, with Sondheim's full corpus bordering on the edge of total artistic hegemony in the 70's and 80's, that is a very noteworthy distinction.

The brilliance of this show is that it works off well-established material, fairy tales, and uses them as a fabric to weave a broader story. The first act re-tells the tales of Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstalk, Little Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel, and a new story, about a Baker and his wife who are unable to conceive a child. Lapine brilliantly intertwines their stories together while Sondheim perfectly underscores the show with original music and lyrics that simultaneously capture the essence of the fairy tales while somehow finding a way to enable them to soar beyond their original themes and create something greater.

As the fairytales conclude at the end of Act 1, the audience feels a familiar sense of completion. What makes this show so incredible is that Act 2 is an entirely new creation of original material, that outshines the classics from the first act. The authors expand on themes, find deeper meaning with each story, and teach us a valuable lesson about love and loss, while somehow still finding a way to end on a positive note.

As most theatre fans are aware, we lost Stephen Sondheim a few months ago. A titan of the industry thought by many to be the greatest composer and most noteworthy figure in the history of musical theatre, his death leaves a gaping hole in our community that can never fully be filled. Our department had decided to produce this musical long before the news of his death, (it's a long time in the making here, as the show was originally slotted to be a part of our season in 2021) but it feels like a blessing to get to work on one of his most popular shows, perhaps as a way to say goodbye to this giant of musical theatre.

Try as I might, I feel I lack the words to properly pay tribute to Mr. Sondheim. Perhaps it would be better to leave the heavy lifting to the master and end this note with a few parting thoughts of wisdom from the individual whose work we will try to honor this evening.

For inspiration: "If I cannot fly, let me sing." -*Sweeney Todd*

For perspective: "Stop worrying where you're going. Move on. If you can know where you're going, you've gone. Just keep moving on." – *Sunday in the Park with George*

For closure: "Sometimes people leave you, halfway through the wood. Do not let it grieve you, no one leaves for good. You are not alone. No one is alone." – *Into the Woods*

Thank you, Mr. Sondheim. We will keep moving on.