

Twisted Tales

Taking familiar yarns a few chapters further.

Into the Woods takes fairy tale characters from their pre-ordained destinies and puts them into a world where there are random elements beyond the characters' control. At first, the play doesn't seem to carry much depth, but it progresses into a powerful statement about human error.

The play opens with three different sets distanced just enough to understand that we are seeing four different plots unfold. One is an original story of an infertile baker and his wife; the other tales are those of Cinderella, Rapunzel, Jack and the Beanstalk and Little Red Riding Hood. The main focus is on the baker and his wife, who must somehow obtain four items from the other fairy tale characters in order for a witch to lift a family curse of infertility. The plot progresses smoothly from point A to B. Like any self-respecting fairy tale, by the end of the first act everyone gets what they want and go off to live happily ever after — except that the narrator says, "To be continued."

Either act of the play could stand on its own with some minor revision. The first act is a whimsical take on the traditional fairy tale that merely scratches the surface of why fairy tales do not accurately portray real life, either in content or in theme. It could function on its own as a simple fairy tale for children, but one that pokes fun at itself. The fairy tale dialect that seems perfectly ordinary within a book jacket is ludicrous onstage — and the cast takes every advantage of the comic potential. Little Red Riding Hood (Liz Kadel) makes the most of being "eaten" by the wolf, drawing chuckles from the audience at the obvious optical illusion. Part of the musical's charm is poking fun at the obvious leaps the audience must make for onstage optical illusions.

In the second act, though, the plot goes beyond "happily ever after." The audience then finds out that the interactions between the characters have led them down an entirely different path. Questions no longer have clear "right" and "wrong" answers, and as adultery, death, envy, parenting dilemmas, and what seem like acts of God force the

characters to reconsider their previously drawn paths. Conflicts, death and personal crises suddenly turn what were previously relatively flat characters into multidimensional people with flaws. The actors' characterizations of traditional fairy tale figures change from simplistic to more developed, realistic individuals in the second act. Watching the baker (Blake Hodgetts) grapple with grief and blame is especially moving.

Though the first half of *Into the Woods* works well on its own, it is the second act that turns the play from a lighthearted jab at traditional fairy tales to a complicated tale about humanity's flaws.

The fairy tale dialect that seems perfectly ordinary within a book jacket is **LUDICROUS ONSTAGE**

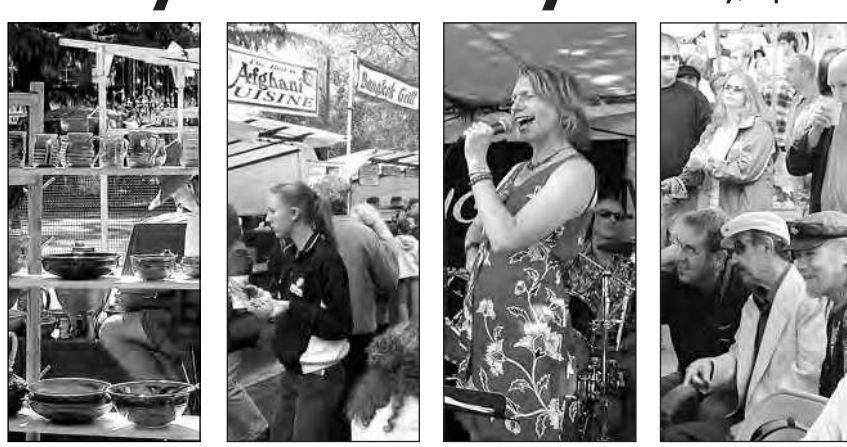
— and the cast takes every advantage of the comic potential.

The musical sequences are delightful. Jill Gillett and Cate Wolfenbarger perfect the lilt-ing princess voice, and the two pompous princes (Chris Carwithen and Matt Musgrove) delight the audience with their uproarious rendition of "Agony," one of the best musical numbers in the show. Though the choreography is relatively simple, it complements the vocals without being awkward or overpowering. The audience seemed spell-bound by the ability of the play to be both whimsical and profound. The point is, though, that life doesn't work out as it should and that happily ever after, just like every other guarantee in life, is a sham. And though everyone knows by now that life isn't fair, watching tragedy strike characters who don't know it seems to make that very old piece of wisdom fresh and poignant. **EW**

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