



Cottage Theatre Stands up to Sondheim

Into the Woods no Disney romp

A mismatched bunch of fairy tale favorites heads off into the woods to find their dreams, bumping into one another in a world of wolves and witches and wishes and magic. *Into the Woods* is often misleadingly billed as an irreverent romp though the world of fairy tales. A deep and difficult play, *Into the Woods* is a thoroughly modern take on traditional children's stories, firmly grounded in their Grimm, psychological roots. While the first

act holds bounding princes and misplaced magic beans, the second deals with the question of what happens after Happily Ever After. Audience members will laugh but spend more time questioning life's choices and contemplating the complexity of family relationships.

Composer/lyricist Stephen Sondheim is an important innovator, a composer with more Tony awards than any other, a creator of stories driven by true and interesting

characters. His work elevates musical theater to high art. But he is not easy. His unexpectedly complex music takes not only talent but disciplined hard work to sing, and even then it doesn't necessarily sound very pretty. His patter songs, full of beautiful language and exquisite word play, can be, as one actor said, an intense expression of character and emotion. On the other hand, it can also feel like being trapped in a relentless downbeat while people say deep things *ad nauseam*. Sondheim is a little like that important W. H. Auden poem you had to study in high school. To some it will speak directly to the soul, opening up new paths and cementing a life philosophy, while to others it will seem long, difficult and a little boring.

That means the bar for a good Sondheim performance is high. What is remarkable about the Cottage Theatre's community production is that so many actors surpass it. Director Peg Major once again packs her stage with powerful voices. Most of her many leads were able to master the music and endear as characters. Nick Forrest shines as the Baker. Buffee Ann Gillihan is a Cinderella you can readily identify with, and Melissa Miller is perfectly obnoxious as Little Red Riding Hood. Smaller roles were played with energy and creativity. I particularly enjoyed Lindy Lou Smith's Milky White Cow.

Overall, the staging was uninspired. Movement could have been more organic and more interesting, but quite frankly I am always amazed at anyone who can sing

Sondheim and even walk simultaneously.

Oddly enough, the parts of this production that kept popping me out of the woods were the very bits I should never have noticed: technical issues. Nearly every character was individually miked, providing an artificial quality to the voices and a mole-like apparition somewhere on each person's right cheek. In a space so intimate with voices so big, this struck me as unnecessary. You have Nikki Pagniano on stage; what do you need an individual microphone for? The set was highly creative yet overly complex and a bit clunky. There were so many good ideas combined that it drew my attention from the action it was meant to support. In a brave act, designer Fe02 choose to set the orchestra pit directly in the center of the thrust, taking up the very best acting space with a clarinet etc. It was a cool idea, but while edgy, the choice put more focus on the slide trombone than might otherwise be warranted. I applaud the guts; I regret the ultimate outcome.

There are so many pieces of this production that are absolutely beautiful, and together, they create mammoth dramatic experience. With a play three hours long that weaves together at least eight additional stories, *Into the Woods* gives a lot of theater for the money. Director Peg Major reminds us not to park our brains at the door, and that's sound advice. For this good community theater production, you'll definitely need your brain. **EW**

Into the Woods continues through Aug. 22. Tix at www.cottagetheatre.org or 942-8001.

The Willamettans Family Nudist Resort,
where all you need to wear is a smile.

Summer is going by fast but it is not too late to come for a visit.
August 8th from 10am to 4pm
is our last Open House for this year.

This is a chance for a free visit to see what the nudist world at the Willamettans is all about. Come see the best campground in Oregon in a clothes free environment. Give it a try, you owe it to yourself.



The Willamettans
A clothing optional RV Resort

Swimming Pool • Tennis Courts • Horseshoes • Camping or Rentals

541-933-2809 willamettans.com
aanr.com • 1-800-TRY-NUDE

Sushi Ya
JAPANESE CUISINE AND SUSHI BAR

Birthday Special - \$20 OFF!
(Minimum \$60 order and must show valid ID)



DINE IN OR TAKE OUT
5E 8th Ave • Eugene, OR • 541-686-3464
HOURS: Mon-Wed 11:30am-2pm and 5pm-9pm
Tues. & Thu.-Sat. 11:30am-9:30pm • Sunday 5pm-10pm

The Potters' Quarter 

PAINT YOUR OWN

SUMMER SPECIAL

SAVE \$4 ON ANY PROJECT OVER \$13
With this coupon



Offer Expires: August 31, 2009. One coupon per person, not valid on Ladies' Night, Parties or with any other discounts

ALL AGES WELCOME
110 Oakway Ctr Eugene, OR 97401 (541) 434-9277

Sign and Date: _____ Total Purchase: \$ _____