



Victorian
Opera

Stephen Sondheim & James Lapine

INTO THE WOODS

Education Resource
Theatre Studies



INTO THE WOODS RESOURCE – VCE THEATRE STUDIES UNIT 4

INTRODUCTION



Figure 1: Victorian Opera - Into the Woods © Jeff Busby

“A gem of a fairy tale with a soundscape of soaring melodies, shimmering colours and extraordinarily witty and moving lyrics.”- Richard Mills

A darkly enchanting story about life after the ‘happily ever after’. Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine reimagine the magical world of fairy tales as the classic stories of Jack and the Beanstalk, Cinderella, Little Red Ridinghood and Rapunzel collide with the lives of a childless baker and his wife. A brand new production of an unforgettable Tony award-winning musical.

Into the Woods | Stephen Sondheim & James Lapine.
19 – 26 July 2014 | Arts Centre Melbourne, Playhouse

Music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim
Book by James Lapine

Originally Directed on Broadway by James Lapine

By arrangement with Hal Leonard Australia Pty Ltd Exclusive agent for Music Theatre International (NY)

2 hours and 50 minutes including one interval.





Figure 2: Victorian Opera - Into the Woods © Jeff Busby

*Into the woods and down the dell,
The path is straight, I know it well.
Into the woods, and who can tell
What's waiting on the journey?*

In the Prologue to *Into the Woods*, the main characters sing these words and a magical quest begins. In many ways the experience you will have seeing *Into the Woods* will be similar. The audience must go 'on the journey' with the characters to truly experience the production; the audience's presence ensures the characters' reality.

As students of Theatre Studies you will also need to consider how the journey happens; the design, the performances, the direction and how a world is created for the characters to inhabit. You will make decisions about the intended meaning of the performance. That may not always be a straight pathway but there's the fun.

Into the Woods is a musical. Importantly, it is a Stephen Sondheim musical. This means that it offers both challenges and opportunities to the performers and the audience, but particularly to those who are studying it for Theatre Studies Unit 4. In musicals, it is the music and the songs that drive the narrative and express the motivations of the main characters. In analysing and evaluating the production, the realisation of characters and the characters' journeys, the type and the positioning of songs, and the music you hear is all very important.



These education notes serve to act as an introduction to the Victorian Opera's production of *Into the Woods*. They provide a background to fairy tales, folklore and the stories that inform the production. They provide insight into the genre of musical theatre and the musical's creator, Stephen Sondheim, and librettist, James Lapine. Finally, the notes offer a way to focus your study according to the Key Knowledge and the Key Skills of the Outcome. Not the way...just one way. You are encouraged to find your own meaning.

Victorian Opera also offer online podcasts of interviews with key members of the creative team, available shortly on the Victorian Opera website: <http://www.victorianopera.com.au>

The realm of fairy-story is wide and deep and high and filled with many things: all manner of beasts and birds are found there; shoreless seas and stars uncounted; beauty that is an enchantment, and an ever-present peril; both joy and sorrow as sharp as swords - J.R.R. Tolkien, On Fairy-Stories (1966)

Creative Team

Musical Director Benjamin Northey

Associate Musical Director Phoebe Briggs

Director Stuart Maunder

Set Designer Adam Gardnir

Costume Designer Harriet Oxley

Lighting Designer Philip Lethlean

Sound Designer Jim Atkins



Figure 3: Victorian Opera - Into the Woods © Jeff Busby

Cast

Rapunzel Olivia Cranwell

Cinderella's Stepmother Antoinette Halloran

Rapunzel's Prince Jeremy Kleeman

Cinderella's Mother/Granny/Giant Noni McCallum

Wolf/Cinderella's Prince Matthew McFarlane

Cinderella Lucy Maunder

Baker's Wife Christina O'Neill

Baker David Harris

Jack's Mother Melissa Langton

Jack Rowan Witt

Florinda Elise McCann

Lucinda Angela Scundi

Cinderella's Father David Rogers-Smith

Little Red Ridinghood Josie Lane

Witch Queenie van de Zandt

Narrator/Mysterious Man
John Diedrich

Steward David Rogers-Smith



MEET THE CHARACTERS

The Narrator – Narrates parts of the story for the audience and becomes unintentionally involved

The Baker - A Baker who cannot conceive a child with his wife due to the Witch's curse.

The Baker's Wife – Confident and intelligent woman who wants a child, but cannot have one due to the Witch's curse.

The Witch – Rapunzel's guardian. She has many powers. She has cursed the Baker's family with infertility.

Rapunzel – Kept high in a tower by the Witch. She has long flowing hair, as yellow as corn, used by the Witch to climb to her in the tower.

Cinderella – A poor young girl whose mother and father have died leaving her with a mean stepmother and two mean stepsisters. She wishes to go to the King's Festival.

Cinderella's Stepmother – Very mean to Cinderella. She loves her two other daughters, Lucinda and Florinda.

Lucinda – Cinderella's beautiful, but nasty, stepsister. She wants to marry a Prince.

Florinda – Cinderella's other beautiful, but nasty, step-sister. She also wants to marry a Prince.

Cinderella's Prince – A very attractive and very vain Prince, who searches for Cinderella after meeting her at the Festival. Brother to Rapunzel's Prince.

Rapunzel's Prince – Brother to Cinderella's Prince, also very vain and very handsome. He yearns to marry Rapunzel after hearing her singing in her tower.

The Wolf – A wolf who meets and eats Little Red Ridinghood in the woods.

Jack – A poor but ambitious boy who loves his cow, Milky White. He sells Milky White to the Baker for magic beans.

Jack's Mother – Angry with Jack for being such a dreamer. Constantly worried about money.

Little Red Ridinghood – A naïve young girl. After visiting the Baker and his Wife to obtain bread, she happily sets off to visit her Granny and meets the Wolf.

Granny – Little Red Ridinghood's grandmother.

The Mysterious Man – Appears periodically in the Woods, especially to the Baker.

The Prince's Steward – Serves Cinderella's Prince.



SYNOPSIS

Once upon a time...in a far-off kingdom...lived a young maiden...a sad young lad...and a childless baker...with his wife...and so begins Stephen Sondheim's Into the Woods. The audience is transported into a fairy tale-like world, but one where familiar characters and familiar stories don't all end happily ever after.



Figure 4: Victorian Opera - Into the Woods (The Baker, The Witch & The Baker's Wife) © Jeff Busby

escapes from the tower with the aid of a Prince and her long golden hair. Two additional, yet central characters, the Baker and his Wife have a simple quest – to have a family. The Baker and his Wife discover that the Witch has placed a curse on their house and the only way to lift the curse and to bear a child is to journey 'into the woods' and mess up everybody else's fairy story. Their quest is to obtain: 'a cape as red as blood' from 'Little Red Ridinghood; a 'slipper as pure as gold' from Cinderella; 'a cow as white as milk' which is exchanged for magic beans by Jack; and 'hair as yellow as corn' from Rapunzel 'in order to get what they want they had to cheat a little, or lie a little, or huckster a little'. At the end of the act one, they retrieve the items and all appear to 'live happily ever after'.

Act 2

The second act is darker. The characters, having had their wishes come true, have to take responsibility and deal with the consequences. Does a marriage to a prince result in a happy life? What does one do with a slain giant in ones backyard? Are characters purely good or purely evil? They learn to work together as a community rather than resorting to a culture of blaming others. Through adversity, they undergo a transformation and attempt to solve the problems to create their own version of a 'happily ever after'. *Into the Woods* is a cautionary tale that states; be careful what you wish for.

Act 1

The first act of *Into the Woods* focuses on the 'Happily Ever After' we often expect in fairy tales. Four well-known fairy tale characters are introduced and go on their predictable quests. Cinderella goes to the ball to meet her Prince Charming, Jack climbs the Beanstalk to discover a land of giants, Red Ridinghood encounters a Wolf disguised as her grandma, and Rapunzel



SONG LIST

Act I

- "Act One Prologue"** – Narrator, and Company (the Act One Prologue is divided into nine parts which are often viewed as individual songs)
- "Cinderella at the Grave"** – Cinderella, Cinderella's Mother
- "Hello, Little Girl"** – Wolf and Little Red Ridinghood
- "The Spell is On My House" (Reprise)** – Baker and Baker's Wife
- "I Guess This is Goodbye"** – Jack
- "Maybe They're Magic"** – Baker and Baker's Wife
- "Our Little World"** – Witch and Rapunzel
- "Maybe They're Magic" (Reprise)** – Baker
- "I Know Things Now"** – Little Red Ridinghood
- "A Very Nice Prince"** – Cinderella and Baker's Wife
- "First Midnight"** – Company
- "Giants in the Sky"** – Jack
- "Agony"** – Cinderella's Prince and Rapunzel's Prince
- "A Very Nice Prince" (Reprise)** – Cinderella and Baker's Wife
- "It Takes Two"** – Baker and Baker's Wife
- "Second Midnight"** – Witch, Cinderella's Prince, Rapunzel's Prince, Stepmother, Florinda, Lucinda
- "Stay with Me"** – Rapunzel and Witch

- "On the Steps of the Palace"** – Cinderella (with Jack and Little Red Ridinghood in 2002 revival)
- "Act One Finale"** – Narrator and Company (the Act One Finale is divided into four parts which are often viewed as individual songs)

Act II

- "Act Two Prologue"** – Narrator and Company (the Act Two Prologue is divided into nine parts which are often viewed as individual songs)
- "Agony" (Reprise)** – Cinderella's Prince and Rapunzel's Prince
- "Witch's Lament"** – Witch
- "Any Moment (Part 1)"** – Cinderella's Prince and Baker's Wife
- "Any Moment (Part 2)"** – Cinderella's Prince and Baker's Wife
- "Moments in the Woods"** – Baker's Wife
- "Your Fault"** – Jack, Baker, Cinderella, Little Red Ridinghood and Witch
- "Last Midnight"** – Witch
- "No More"** – Baker and Mysterious Man
- "No One is Alone (Part 1)"** – Cinderella and Little Red Ridinghood
- "No One is Alone (Part 2)"** – Cinderella, Baker, Little Red Ridinghood and Jack
- "Act Two Finale – Children will Listen"** – Company (the finale is divided into four parts which are often viewed as individual songs)

Questions:

- How does the synopsis, character list and song titles provide an insight into the world of the musical?
- What do you learn about the characters?
- What do you learn about the theatrical styles?
- What do you learn about the intended meaning of the story and the production?



STRUCTURE OF INTO THE WOODS

Into the Woods is written in two acts. Act One comprises five scenes, Act Two comprises two scenes. There is an interval between the Acts. The production contains multiple stories and multiple narratives. On viewing the production you may notice that scenes blend and blur and at other times seem episodic. The Prologue is fifteen minutes in length, with many characters and multiple stories, each character determining what their journey into the woods will be. To assist, Sondheim and Lapine have included a narrator. The function of the Narrator is traditional – the narrate aspects of the story – however, this narrator finds himself inside the story and this has significant consequences for the characters.

The original Broadway production can be viewed at:

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL10D54BB6D383DFB5>

MUSICAL THEATRE – MORE GENERALLY

In musical theatre the key to successful songs is how well lyrics and music work together. Songs may function dramatically in several ways, a primary one being to define character. Within the genre of musical theatre such character songs serve a number of functions.

Character songs

'I am' songs: Because musicals are by nature 'presentational' characters may introduce themselves directly to the audience through 'I am' songs. 'I am' songs can also allow characters to express freely how they are feeling at that moment, for example Maria's 'I feel Pretty' in *West Side Story*, and sometimes characters discover something about themselves in an 'I am' song. Besides defining oneself and providing moments of self-revelation through these types of songs, characters may also assert themselves against a challenge.

'I want' songs: Where 'I am' songs describe a present state, 'I want' songs suggest a course of action for the future. Characters often express their goals and dreams through these types of songs. For example, in *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye dreams of wealth in 'If I were a rich man'. Some characters may also use these songs to say what they 'don't want'.

Reprises: Often a song will occur again in the musical as a 'reprise' which can be used effectively to reveal how a character has developed during the story. An effective reprise which functions dramatically reveals the development of character since the last time it was sung. The lyrics may reflect a change in the character's attitude or self-awareness, or they may indicate a change in situation. In *West Side Story* Tony and Maria reprise their romantic ballad 'Tonight', but now it is the night of the gang's street fight and it takes on a new meaning.

Emotional climax songs: When characters reach a point in the drama where they can't help but explode with feelings or love or success or simply the joy of live, music serves to amplify these emotions to a level above mere words. Emotional climax songs are exuberant, celebratory and infectious, allowing the audience to share the character's passion and excitement.



Songs that tell the story

Exposition songs: Because songs take up time reserved for dialogue in the play, musicals must move quickly to establish the dramatic situation, introduce the main characters, and give audiences some reason to care about them. Exposition songs inform an audience what has happened and what may have brought the characters to this point in the action. They may also preview the themes of the story.

Conflict songs: At the heart of every drama lies conflict. Some of the most interesting and exciting songs in Musical Theatre involve conflict, when characters struggle.

Narration songs: Narration songs describe events that we otherwise may not see – what has happened off-stage for instance.

Summary songs: Similar to narration songs, summary songs compress lengthy amounts of time into one song.

Songs with special functions

Comment songs: A character not in the dramatic scene may step to one side and sing about events on stage. Stephen Sondheim uses this device in several of his musicals including *Company* and *A Little Night Music*.

Musical metaphors: These songs take advantage of the unique qualities of musical theatre to portray a situation in presentational, non-literal fashion. Much of *Into the Woods* acts metaphorically, especially with regard to wishes and desires.

Cameo songs: Cameo songs feature a minor character in a memorable number, someone who otherwise might be forgotten. A good cameo song defines a minor character quickly and effectively as well as giving a performer in a small role time in the spotlight

Parodies: These rely on an audience's familiarity with music that is not in the show they are watching, but is used to evoke an appropriate mood.

(Source: Spurrier, James. *The Integration of Music and Lyrics with the Book in the American Musical*. Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Illinois U, 1979)

Questions:

Using the above descriptions as a guide, identify which 'type' of song style might apply to the following:

- "A very Nice Prince" – Cinderella
- "Children will Listen" – the Witch
- "Agony" – the two Princes



MUSICAL THEATRE – SONDHEIM STYLE

Into the Woods as described by Sondheim is a musical – a fairy tale quest musical. There is spoken dialogue as well as songs where Sondheim uses these both for more in depth character interpretation and reflection. A narrator is employed in a pantomimic style but through the progression of the musical, this role morphs into simultaneously being an external observer and a character.

Into the Woods is a break-away of the large scale musicals of the 1980s. Sondheim's style as seen in *Sunday in the Park with George*, his earlier musical in which collaborated with Lapine is more intimate employing a small cast and orchestra. The chamber opera style is one where each performer utilises an important role in the plot, and the orchestral parts are intricately linked with a performer on stage. Through this technique of economy, Sondheim displays his creative brilliance.



Figure 5: Victorian Opera - *Into the Woods* (Jack and Jack's Mother) © Jeff Busby

*There are giants in the sky!
There are big, tall, terrible giants in
the sky!
When you're way up high, and you
look below,
At the world you've left and the
things you know,
Little more than a glance is enough
to show
You just how small you are
- Jack*

DEEPER INTO THE WOODS...

In most productions of *Into the Woods*, including the original Broadway production, several parts are doubled. Cinderella's Prince and the Wolf, who share the characteristic of being unable to control their appetites, are played by the same actor. Similarly, the Narrator and the Mysterious Man, who share the characteristic of commenting on the story while avoiding any personal involvement or responsibility. Granny and Cinderella's Mother, who are both matriarchal characters in the story, are also typically played by the same person, who also gives voice to the nurturing but later murderous Giant's Wife.

The show covers multiple themes: growing up, parents and children, accepting responsibility, morality, and finally, wish fulfilment and its consequences. The Time Magazine reviewers wrote that the play's "basic insight ... is at heart, most fairy tales are about the loving yet embattled relationship between parents and children. Almost everything that goes wrong — which is to say, almost everything that can — arises from a failure of parental or filial duty, despite the best intentions". Stephen Holden wrote that the themes of the show include parent-child relationships and the



individual's responsibility to the community. The witch isn't just a scowling old hag, but a key symbol of moral ambivalence. James Lapine said that the most unpleasant person (the Witch) would have the truest things to say and the "nicer" people would be less honest. In the Witch's words: "I'm not good; I'm not nice; I'm just right."

The score is also notable in Sondheim's output, because of its intricate reworking and development of small musical motifs. In particular, the opening words, "I wish", are set to the interval of a rising major second and this small unit is both repeated and developed throughout the show, just as Lapine's book explores the consequences of self-interest and "wishing." The dialogue in the show is characterised by the heavy use of syncopated speech. In many instances, the characters' lines are delivered with a fixed beat that follows natural speech rhythms, but is also purposely composed in eighth, sixteenth, and quarter note rhythms as part of a spoken song. Like many Sondheim/Lapine productions, the songs contain thought-process narrative, where characters converse or think aloud.

Sondheim drew on parts of his troubled childhood when writing the show. In 1987, he told Time Magazine that the "father uncomfortable with babies [was] his father, and [the] mother who regrets having had children [was] his mother."

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Into_the_Woods



Figure 6: Victorian Opera - Into the Woods (Witch) © Jeff Busby

*Go to the wood and bring me back:
One: the cow as white as milk,
Two: the cape as red as blood,
Three: The hair as yellow as corn,
Four: the slipper as pure as gold.
Bring me these before the chime of
midnight. In three days' time, and
you shall have, I guarantee, a child
as perfect as child can be.
Go to the wood
- The Witch*



THE WORLD OF THE MUSICAL

Fairy tales as genre

A fairy tale is a fictional story that may feature folkloric characters (such as fairies, goblins, elves, trolls, witches, giants, and talking animals) and enchantments, often involving a far-fetched sequence of events. The term is also used to describe something blessed with unusual happiness, as in "fairy tale ending" (a happy ending) or "fairy tale romance," though not all fairy tales end happily. Fairy tales are a genre in literature. They have their roots in the oral tradition. Fairy tales with very similar plots, characters, and motifs are found spread across many different cultures. Fairy tales also tend to take on the colour of their location, through the choice of motifs, the style in which they are told, and the depiction of character and local colour.

Special beginning and/or ending words

Once upon a time...and they lived happily ever after. Sometimes, there's a surprise ending...

Good character

Do you see a kind, innocent character? Is the good character clever? Is s/he helped by others?

Evil character

Do you see a witch? A demon? An evil stepmother? A sinister gnome?

In the end, the evil character usually loses somehow...

Royalty

Is there a castle? A prince? A princess? A king? A queen?

Poverty

Do you see a poor working girl, a poor family, a poor shepherd? – Do you see poor people trying to eke out a living to have enough to eat?

Magic and Enchantments

Do you see magical things happening? Do you see talking animals/objects? You might see fairies, trolls, elves, goblins, etc.

Reoccurring Patterns / Numbers

Do you see any patterns? Often, you'll see things, phrases, tasks appear in "threes," "sixes," and/or "sevens"

Universal Truths

The tale probably touches on some universal experiences (i.e., coming of age) or hopes (i.e., to have enough food and love)

Adapted from: http://www.surfturk.com/mythology/fairy_taleelements.html

THE BROTHERS GRIMM - JACOB (1785-1863) AND WILHELM (1786-1859)

The Brothers Grimm (or Die Brüder Grimm), Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786–1859), were German academics, linguists, cultural researchers, lexicographers and authors who together collected and published folklore. The brothers spent their formative years in the German town of Hanau. Their father's death in 1796 (when Jacob was eleven and Wilhelm ten) caused great poverty for the family and affected the brothers for many years after. They both attended the University of Marburg where they developed a curiosity about German folklore, which grew into a lifelong dedication to collecting German folk tales.



Romanticism and Romantic Nationalism in early 19th century revived an interest in fairy tales. The Grimm brothers were deeply interested in the fairy tales referencing German folklore or culture. Charles Perrault's tales published in 1697 were also highly influential. The brothers began collecting tales for the purpose of creating a scholarly treatise of traditional stories and of preserving the stories as they had been handed from generation to generation—a practice that was threatened by increased industrialisation.

They published their collection as 'Children and Household Tales' – 'Kinder und Hausmärchen' – in 1812. The collection contains legends and folk stories, the vast majority of which were not intended as children's tales. At the time there was deep concern about the content of some of the tales—such as those that showed children being eaten—and it was suggested these aspects be removed. Instead the brothers added an introduction with cautionary advice that parents steer children toward age-appropriate stories. None of the tales were eliminated from the collection, in the brothers' belief that all the tales were of value and reflected inherent cultural qualities, as well as being didactic in nature.

Some scholars argue that the Grimms published their collection as a resistance to French occupation. They are indeed 'grim' and often violent, which some believe reflect their medieval beginnings, or deeper Germanic mythologies.

Interestingly, during the Third Reich, the Grimms' stories were used to foster nationalism and the Nazi Party decreed 'Kinder-und-Hausmärchen' was a book each household should own. Later in Allied-occupied Germany, the book was actually banned for a period of time.

Adapted from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brothers_Grimm

A selection of Grimm's traditional fairy tales translated from the German including Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstalk, Rapunzel and Red Ridinghood can be viewed and/or downloaded at: http://www.fijihosting.com/dload/grimms_fairy_tales.pdf

CONTEXTS FOR THE WRITER

The context in which Sondheim was writing his work and the drive to create new work was in reaction to more traditional Broadway musical forms. He was also writing during the emergence of the postmodern movement.

Postmodernism

I place Sondheim's career in the context of two overlapping cultural moments. The first is the exhaustion of the Rodgers and Hammerstein aesthetic of the Broadway musical.

The second context for Sondheim's musicals is the growing cultural presence of Postmodernism, which by the late 1960s was evidenced in the arts. Postmodernism is a slippery and sometimes contentious term to define, not least because the postmodern enterprise resists definition. The self-referentiality (of Postmodernism), the awareness of the discourse that is expressing the art, the refusal to let the audience suspend its disbelief, the self-awareness of art points, not to the world, but to itself pointing to the world. In Postmodernism, there is a scepticism about narrative as a meaning-conveying vehicle.



In the plays of the 1980s, 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, Sondheim and his collaborators continued to explore the limitations of conventional narrative and to find new possibilities for meaning in unconventional structures. *Into the Woods* (1987) in its first act intertwines the ineluctable (inescapable) forward-moving structure of fairy tales with a backward-looking desire to restore fragmented families. In its second act, narrative structure is lost altogether and the characters try to find meaning by taking responsibility for their actions and by forming ad hoc relationships.

Source: Gordon, Robert L (2014), Sondheim and Postmodernism, Chapter 2, *The Oxford Handbook of Sondheim Studies* (pp 25-38), 2014.

Musical background and its impact on the writing

Sondheim's talent derived from his ability to cross genres of music and theatre to offer Broadway audiences' works of remarkable craft on unexpected subjects that challenged and tested the form of the American musical. Sondheim explored issues of contemporary life; marriage and relationships, madness and the human condition, nostalgia and sentiment, injustice and revenge, choice and consequence. Sondheim avoided filler in his lyrics and concentrated on direct impact through verbal interplay. His lyrics were witty without his ever sacrificing integrity for superficially clever rhyme. Sondheim's consistent ability to merge words and music that hint at the deeper personality beneath the prototype character distinguished him as a composer of rare ingenuity and talent.

Source: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/broadway/stars/stephen-sondheim/>

Sondheim develops a new lyric, musical and theatrical language for each work. His structures are closer to the freewheeling patterns of avant-garde non-musical theatre. Time and place are fragmented and distorted. Logical connections are associated rather than linear. Sondheim and his collaborators experiment with the notion of theatre as a game that the audience actively plays, engaging with the works intellectually. This is achieved especially through musical language, the emotional impact of tonality, the stimulating effect of rhythm, the soothing quality of harmony, the expansion and compression of time and feeling. The audience is forced into examining both the lyrics and the music in search of the characters. The effect can be alienating in a Brechtian sense and unquestionably enhances the multileveled implications of the experience.

Source: Gordon, J (1990) *Art Isn't Easy: The Theater of Stephen Sondheim*, Angus and Robertson, US

Postmodernism is a late-20th-century movement in the arts, architecture, and criticism that was a departure from Modernism. Postmodernism includes skeptical interpretations of culture, literature, art, philosophy, history, economics, architecture, fiction, and literary criticism. The term Postmodernism has been applied to a host of movements, many in art, music, and literature, that reacted against tendencies in Modernism, and are typically marked by revival of historical elements and techniques.

Adapted from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernism>

Further Sondheim references:

- Interview with Stephen Sondheim:
<http://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/stephen-sondheim-interview>



- Article written in 2000 in the New York Times on Sondheim's 70th birthday:
<http://partners.nytimes.com/library/magazine/home/20000312mag-sondheim.html>



Figure 7: Victorian Opera - Into the Woods (Red Ridinghood and Wolf) © Jeff Busby

Far more often [than asking the question 'Is it true?'] they [children] have asked me: 'Was he good? Was he wicked?' That is, they were far more concerned to get the Right side and the Wrong side clear. For that is a question equally important in History and in Faerie

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories* (1966)

INTO THE WOODS - ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

AREA OF STUDY 3 PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

Outcome 3

On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse and evaluate acting in a production. To achieve this outcome the student will draw on key knowledge and key skills outlined in Area of Study 3.

Key knowledge

- the character/s in the production including status, motivation and characteristics
- interpretation by actor/s of a playscript in performance
- expressive skills including facial expression, voice, gesture, movement, stillness and silence used by the actor/s to realise character/s
- the use of focus and the acting space
- the use of language to convey the intended meanings of the play
- the interrelationships between acting, direction and design
- the establishment and maintenance of the actor–audience relationship
- the interrelationships between acting and theatrical style/s utilised in the production
- understanding of theatrical terminology and expressions to analyse and evaluate a theatrical production.



Key skills

- analyse the character/s in the production including status, motivation and characteristics
- analyse and evaluate interpretation by actor/s of a playscript in performance, including the acting skills used by actor/s to realise character/s, the use of focus and the acting space and the interrelationships between acting, direction and design
- analyse the use of language to convey the intended meanings of the play
- analyse and evaluate the establishment and maintenance of the actor–audience relationship
- analyse the ways that actor/s work within the theatrical style/s utilised in the production
- use theatre terminology and expression appropriately.

The world of the play

Into the Woods uses fairy tales as its premise.

- What is ‘magical’ about the world of the play? What theatrical elements make it so?
 - What is real in the play? Which characters anchor it in reality?
 - Would you agree that musicals are by their very nature ‘heightened’ and ‘stylised’?
 - What is heightened and stylized about *Into the Woods*?
- Does the show have a linear plot? Are the characters and, thus the audience, propelled forward?
 - What TIME or ERA is the production set in?
 - First midnight, second midnight, third midnight, repetition, counting, rhythm are all referenced in the production
 - Discuss the significance of counting and time in creating the world of the play

Linear plots rarely feature in Sondheim’s work, instead time is more often used as the unifying force.

- What is a ‘linear plot’?

The world of the play could be described as one that includes a sense of magic or fantasy.

- Do you agree?
- How is this magic or fantasy established?
- Consider the characters, the narrative, the design and the music

Theatrical Styles

The key theatrical style apparent in *Into the Woods* is musical theatre, specifically chamber musical theatre. The director of the production, Stuart Maunder, comments that “the ultimate aim of the musical is to tell a story, whether through spoken word, sung word or presence”.

Musical theatre is a form of theatre that combines songs, spoken dialogue, acting, and dance. The story and emotional content of the piece – humour, pathos, love, anger, fear, denial – are communicated through the words, music, movement and technical aspects of the entertainment as an integrated whole.



Theatrical Styles (cont.)

- Musical Theatre asks an audience to accept the notion that songs contribute to the story and the characters' journeys.
- Discuss how the songs contribute to the 'narrative' of Into the Woods.
- Choose two songs from the musical and analyse and evaluate the narrative/story (you can go online to find the lyrics or watch the Broadway performance on YouTube).
- Whose story do they tell? What do they reveal? What comment do they make?
- Discuss how humour, pathos, love, courage, anger, fear, and denial are communicated in the production. How does the music contribute to the evocation of these?



Figure 8: Victorian Opera - Into the Woods (Cinderella's Prince and Rapunzel's Prince) © Jeff Busby



A key feature of the musical is the 'presentational' nature that it demands. In presentational acting the performers acknowledge the audience by speaking or singing to them. Traditionally a 'presentational style' eliminates the 4th wall, or the pretence that the audience is looking in on the real world of the characters.

- How is this apparent in the production? What do you observe about the performers?
- Consider how the following characters contribute to the presentational style – the Witch, the Princes, Cinderella

Refer back to some of the key elements of fairy tales included in this resource.

- Which of these elements were evident in the production of *Into the Woods*?
- How were these elements inverted or subverted?

Stephen Sondheim's work is often considered 'didactic' in nature.

The audience is forced into examining both the lyrics and the music in search of the characters. The effect can be alienating in a Brechtian sense and unquestionably enhances the multileveled implications of the experience.

- What aspects of the production would you consider were Brechtian?
- Did these elements have an alienating effect? Why?

The refusal to let the audience suspend its disbelief:

- Discuss whether the style of the production allowed you to suspend your disbelief throughout the performance.
- Analyse and evaluate, compare and contrast 'suspension of disbelief' and the 'alienation' effect of Epic Theatre.
- Choose particular moments from the production that offer examples of these.

- What does this term mean?
- What is didactic about *Into the Woods*?
- What aspects of the production contribute to the didacticism e.g. dialogue, lyrics, set, character relationships, action, narrative/plot?

Sondheim and his collaborators experiment with the notion of theatre as a game that the audience actively plays, engaging with the works intellectually.

- Do you agree with this statement?
- In what way does the production engage the audience in a 'game'?

Through musical language, the emotional impact of tonality, the stimulating effect of rhythm, the soothing quality of harmony, the expansion and compression of time and feeling -

- How does the style of the music create emotional impact?



How does DIRECTION contribute to theatrical styles in the production of *Into the Woods*?

- Are there aspect of *Into the Woods* that could be considered satirical?
- Are there aspects of the production that are comic?

Actor/audience relationships

In *Into the Woods* the actor/audience relationship is established, maintained and then re-established on a number of occasions by different characters.

- What role does the Narrator have in determining an actor/audience relationship?
- Would you agree that the design depicts a 'proscenium arch'?
- How would you describe the actor/audience relationship that a proscenium arch theatre/design traditionally establishes?
- Do the characters remain within the arch or do they sometimes emerge from it?
- Does a 4th wall ever exist in the production? When?
- How does DIRECTION contribute to the actor/audience relationships in the production
- How does the DESIGN of the production contribute to the actor/audience relationship?

Characterisation – acting and expressive skills

Select TWO of the fairy tale characters in the production e.g. Red Ridinghood, Jack, Cinderella, the Witch, Rapunzel, one of the Princes.

- Would you describe them as caricatures? Would you describe them as 'types'?
- Discuss the use of expressive skills used by the performers to create those particular fairy tale characters - voice, gesture, accent, focus, movement, stillness and silence.
- Are there 'class' differences between these characters e.g. working class and middle class characters?
- Is this evident in the use of voice, accent, timing, pitch etc.?
- How did the use of expressive skills used by the performers contribute to the theatrical styles present in the show?
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the performers' use of expressive skills in creating their characters.
- Did you relate to, sympathise or empathise with any or all of these characters? Why?

Now consider two of the main characters, The Baker and The Baker's Wife.

- How does the performer, David Harris, create The Baker?
- What is specific about the performer's use of voice, focus, gesture, movement, stillness?
- Which characters does he interact with most? Why? Do these characters impact on him?
- Now focus on Christina O'Neill as The Baker's Wife.
- What is specific about the performer's use of expressive skills to create this character?
- Which characters does she interact with most? Why? Do these characters impact on her?
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the performers' use of expressive skills in creating these characters.



DOUBLING – There are three performers who play multiple roles: the Wolf/Prince, Granny/Giant/Cinderella’s Mother and Narrator/Mysterious Man

- Discuss how the performers used their expressive skills to create their other role(s).
- How did they manipulate their voice, facial expression, accent, gesture, movement etc. in order to create a convincing new role?
- How did costume, hair and make-up contribute to the effectiveness of this?

Music and singing are a significant part of the production.

- How does the use of song contribute to the development of character?
- For instance, the portrayal of the character of Rapunzel?
- The portrayal of the Witch?
- The creation of Red Ridinghood?
- Importantly, does each character have particular music, tone, rhythm that we associate with them? Explore specific examples.

Characterisation – status

As you are discussing, analysing and evaluating the production, consider the status play between particular characters in the show. How is a character’s status made evident in performance? How do we recognise high status, what is low status, when does status shift? What are the stakes for characters in these moments?

A fun way to examine status is by considering the two PRINCES who are in competition over their ‘princely-ness’ and in the pursuit of damsels and princesses.

- Discuss the status play between these two characters and how it is generated through expressive skills, the music, the use of space

In Act 1, consider the status play between Cinderella and the Baker’s Wife as they argue over the shoe and what the truth is.

- How is space used? How is voice used? How is tension created?

The character of The Witch is complex. In removing the curse on the Baker and his wife, she gains her youth and beauty but loses her powers.

- Analyse and evaluate how The Witch’s status shifts and changes throughout the production.
- How do expressive skills, direction and use of space contribute to this?

The Giantess – analyse and discuss how the Giantess is created.

- Consider use of voice, sound, relationship to the other characters, use of space, focus, timing, tension.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the creation of this character.



Characterisation – motivation

In *Into the Woods* each of the main characters is on a 'quest'. Explore the motivations of some of the characters. Remember to draw on the elements of the narrative to support your response – circumstance, status, wishes, dreams, desires etc.

- What motivates The Baker and the Baker's Wife to enter the woods?
- Why does Cinderella enter the woods?
- Overall, what motivates Jack?
- In Act II, what motivates the characters to work together?
- Why does the Witch agree to release the curse on the Baker and his Wife?
- How do the performers use their expressive skills to convey what it is they want?

In Act II of the production are these characters motivated by other things?

- Compare and contrast the characters' motivations in Act I and Act II

Characterisation – use of acting/playing space

The two acts of *Into the Woods* take place in several different locations such as cottages, palaces, a bakery, a tower and various exterior locations. The playing space is constructed on a number of levels. There are several different entrances and exists.



Figure 9: Victorian Opera - *Into the Woods* (Rapunzel) © Jeff Busby

- How do the performers navigate and negotiate the levels?
- How are the various exits and entrances used by the performers?
- How does the use of the playing space contribute to the varying statuses between the characters?
- Evaluate the use of the playing space, its contribution to the story and to the theatrical styles within the production.



Application of Stagecraft

In this section, you are asked to consider the contribution stagecraft makes to the world, the story and the characters in *Into the Woods*.

Direction

Discuss and analyse the directorial decisions made for this production of *Into the Woods*.

- How does direction contribute to timing and pace?
- How does direction contribute to realising and enhancing the theatrical styles?
- How does direction create comedy, drama, tension?
- Select two key scenes or moments in the production and evaluate the effectiveness of the directorial decisions
- Discuss the relationship between direction and music.

Music and Sound

- Discuss how the music created the world of the play
- Were there particular songs, vocals, chords, that stood out?
- REPRISE – what is the function of a reprise and how was it used in *Into the Woods*?
- How does the music contribute to the themes and ideas within the production?
- How is sound used to represent the beans?
- How is sound used to represent elements such as lightening?
- How else is sound used in the production – both diegetic sound and non-diegetic?





Figure 10: Victorian Opera - Into the Woods © Jeff Busby

Set

- Designer, Adam Gardnir, has created a very particular set design.
- Discuss how the set assisted in creating the world of the play
- How does the set enable multiple entrances and exits?
- How would you describe the 'aesthetic' of the set design?
- How did the set design enable multiple locations?
- Consider the theatrical styles inherent in the production and discuss how the set design reflected these.

Theatre technologies

Consider how theatre technologies worked in the theatre to create the different locations required. For instance:

- How did the 'trucks' work functionally and aesthetically?
- How did the cyclorama function?
- How did theatre technologies contribute to the overall aesthetic of the production?

Makeup and hair

Again, this area of stagecraft contributes significantly to the production.

- As you are discussing costume in detail, consider how make-up and hair contributed to the overall aesthetic, age,

class, occupation, and to the creation of each CHARACTER.

- How did costume, hair and make-up contribute to the theatrical styles of the production?
- The Witch - how did costume, make-up and hair assist in creating the older and the younger version of the Witch?

Costume

Costume is a very large part of the production. It is particularly important for creating the fairy tale elements.

- How would you describe the colour palette used in the production?
- How would you describe the overall costume aesthetic?

Take TWO characters from the production and carefully examine the costumes they wore

- Sketch each costume and annotate it for colour, silhouette, texture, period, era, class, and other references you feel assist in enhancing its contribution to creating CHARACTER
- Would you consider the costumes to be intimate or public? Meant to be seen or only worn in private?
- Consider in your discussion the inclusion of ACCESSORIES – hats, gloves, bags, umbrellas
- CHARACTERISATION – discuss how the costumes enhanced the qualities of each character, enhanced or inhibited their movement, determined their class or status?
- Discuss how particular pieces of costuming may have been symbolic e.g. the cloak, the shoe?



Properties

There are a number of significant props used in *Into the Woods* – the basket, the swords, the birds, the bread, the beans, the witch’s ‘wand’ – plus others you will have noticed.

- Make a list of the properties used in the production.
- Link particular props with particular characters.
- Why are certain props significant?
- What additional meaning do they have i.e. beyond being functional?
- How do the design and presence of properties contribute to the theatrical styles within the production?

Intended meaning in the production



Figure 11: Victorian Opera - Into the Woods © Jeff Busby

“In Sondheim’s words, ‘Ah, the woods. The all-purpose symbol of the unconscious, the womb, the past, the dark place where we face our trials and emerge wiser or destroyed.’” – Director, Stuart Maunder.

- Discuss this comment in relation to the production.
- Can you think of examples where these ideas were referenced or represented in the performance?

“But in Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine’s brilliant ‘mash-up’ of classic fairy tales *Into the Woods* we are asked to examine what happens after those three safe, neat words: ‘Happily ever after’” – Director, Stuart Maunder

- How is the idea of ‘happily ever after’ explored in the production?

For the trouble with the real folk of Faerie is that they do not always look like what they are; and they put on the pride and beauty that we would fain wear ourselves.

- J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories* (1966)

- Which characters in the story are proud, vain, or don’t seem who they are?
- What comment about humans is JRR Tolkien making here?



Themes and issues:

Discuss and analyse the meaning of the following lines which are drawn directly from the script. What themes and issues are they exploring? Which characters might embody these ideas?

- “Even flowers have their dangers.”
- “Scary is exciting.”
- “Don’t be scared ... just be prepared.”
- “Isn’t it nice to know a lot? And a little bit not.”
- “Sometimes the things you wish for are not to be touched.”
- “The harder to get, the better to have.”
- “The prettier the flower, the farther from the path.”
- “The difference between a cow and a bean is a bean can begin an adventure.”
- “We had to lose a lot to win.”
- “I ventured out and saw within.”
- “There are shouldn’ts and shoulds.”



Figure 12: Victorian Opera - Into the Woods © Jeff Busby

And it came to pass, all that seemed wrong was now right, the kingdoms were filled with joy, and those who deserved to were certain to live a long and happy life. Ever after...



POST-VISIT REFLECTION

Visit the *Into the Woods* 'Wall' to explore the behind-the-scenes, read the blogs and watch the timelapse videos of the design online victorianopera.com.au/intothewoods

The Wall

PROGRAMME

Immerse yourself in the world of opera with our *Into the Woods* programme! Director Stuart Maunder shares his thoughts on the magical words 'Once upon a time', Conductor Benjamin Northey writes about the connection between text and music, and you can view the beautiful costume illustrations by designer Harriet Oxley and more! [VIEW PROGRAMME ONLINE >](#)



ON THE RADIO

So what does Granny sound like? She made a guest appearance on SYN with host Jeremy Kleeman and his fellow *Into the Woods* cast members Noni McCallum, Josie Lane and Rowan Witt. [Listen to the podcast](#)



SNEAK PEEK

Who lives here?! We couldn't resist a little sneak peek of the *Into the Woods* set (designed by Adam Gardnir).



TIS' THE SEASON FOR HATS!

Some of the beautiful hats created by milliner Phillip Rhodes for the *Into the Woods* production.



IN THE PRESS

"(STEPHEN SONDHEIM) IS MY FAVOURITE COMPOSER. THE RIGHT NOTE SITES ON THE RIGHT PHRASE – IT'S JUST SO CLEVER" – QUEENIE VAN DE ZANDT (THE WITCH).



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Book by James Lapine

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