

Freudian psychology meets musical theater in Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods* by David Ronis

Cinderella wants to go to the ball; Jack wants to climb the beanstalk; Little Red Riding Hood wants to take some goodies to her grandmother; Rapunzel is stuck in a tower. Add to these popular fairy tales one more about a baker, his wife, and the witch next door, weave them all together, and you have the ingenious mashup otherwise known as Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's *Into the Woods*.



University Theatre and University Opera, in partnership with the Wisconsin Union Theater, will co-present a special production of *Into the Woods* at Shannon Hall. This marks the first time in over 12 years that the UW-Madison School of Music and the Department of Theatre and Drama have collaborated on a production. Directed by Karen K. Bishop Director of Opera, David Ronis, and conducted by UW-Madison Director of Orchestras, Chad Hutchinson, the production will feature 20 singer-actors on stage, supported by over 70 instrumentalists, stage crew, and theater artisans from the School of Music, Department of Theatre and Drama, Department of Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies, and from the campus-at-large, accompanied by the UW-Madison Symphony Orchestra.

The timing of this presentation, two weeks after Madison Opera's production of Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*, could not be better for all lovers of musical theater and particularly the work of Stephen Sondheim. The opportunity to see fully-realized, productions of two of Sondheim's major works in such a short time will certainly make February 2019 "Sondheim Month" in Madison.

In this story of interconnected fairy tales, familiar characters venture into the woods to fulfill their deepest wishes. Half way through, it appears that all are succeeding and will live "happily ever after." That is, until the real consequences of the characters' actions come back to haunt them – and they do with a vengeance. Ultimately, each finds resolution and comfort in community, but only after sacrifices are made and difficult lessons are learned.

Into the Woods is chock full of memorable, urbane, often funny, beautiful songs – indeed many of Sondheim's best – including Cinderella's "On the Steps of the Palace," Jack's "Giants in the Sky," the ironic duet, "Agony," sung by the two Princes, the Witch's heartfelt "Stay With Me," and finally, the show's moving anthem "No One is Alone."

UW-Madison's elaborate production will feature the work of two student designers. M.F.A. scenic design student **John Drescher** will contribute an imaginative set that incorporates projections (assisted by **Ariana White**, **Jake Prine**, and **Emma Bruland**) and involves many moving parts! Senior **Ethan White** will create the aural soundscape of the show, serving as sound designer and assisted by **Isabel Coff**, sound engineer. They will be joined by professionals: costume designer **Ashley Bellet**, lighting designer **Kenneth Ferencek**, and props designer **Lydia Berggruen**. Completing the production team will be production stage manager **Jahana Azodi**, technical director **Greg Silver**, scene shop head **Rob Wagner**, assistant directors **Benjamin Hopkins** and **Thomas Kasdorf**, and assistant stage managers **Molly Jean Frisch** and **Dylan Thoren**. Providing additional production support will be scenic charge **Emily Rudolf**, lighting board operator **Hope Robiolio**, and master electrician **Alice Combs**.

The Cast

The majority of performers on stage will be undergraduate students.

The Witch: Bryanna Plaisir

Baker: Michael Kelley

Baker's Wife: Emily Vandenberg

Narrator/Mysterious Man: Joshua Kelly

The Wolf/Steward: Cobi Tappa

Cinderella's Prince: Benjamin Galvin

Cinderella: Elisheva Pront (*Thurs eve/Sat eve/Sun Matinee*)
Miranda Kettlewell (*Fri eve/Sat matinee*)

Little Red Ridinghood: Meghan Stecker (*Thurs eve/Sat eve/Sun Matinee*)
Zoe Bockhorst (*Fri eve/Sat matinee*)

Jack: Christian Brenny

Jack's Mother: Quanda Johnson

Rapunzel: Kelsey Wang

Rapunzel's Prince: Tanner Zocher

Cinderella's Mother, Granny, and the Giant: Angela Peterson

Florinda: Josie Brandmeier

Lucinda: Shasparay Lighteard

Cinderella's Stepmother: Faith Fuller

Cinderella's Father: Zach Wolff

Besides **Maestro Hutchinson**, the musical team will consist of UW-Madison vocal coach **Dr. Daniel Fung**, doctoral candidate **Thomas Kasdorf** (musical preparation), and **Wade Troyer** (rehearsal pianist). In addition, doctoral student **Michael Dolan** will serve as assistant conductor and conduct one performance. Estimated performance time is 2 hours and 45 minutes including intermission.

Tickets are \$40 for premium seating, \$32 general admission, \$25 for UW-Madison Faculty/Staff/Seniors (62+), \$15 for non-UW-Madison students and \$10 for UW-Madison students. Purchase in advance through the Campus Arts Ticketing office at (608) 265-ARTS and online. Tickets may also be purchased in person at the Wisconsin Union Theater Box Office. Because shows often sell out, advance purchase is recommended.

VIEWPOINT: A Composer's Perspective by Jeff Gibbens

Sondheim's *Into the woods*. So what is *Into the woods*? Sondheim has called it a farce. Both the spoken dialogue and the lyrics advance multiple overlapping plots at breakneck speed, and the humor is all situation and character driven. For example, Jack's beautiful song "There are giants in the sky" tells the story of Jack's foray up the beanstalk with little reflection on what it means,



Joanna Gleason as *The Baker's Wife*, Original Broadway cast

leaving the music to tell the listener about the newly-enlightened Jack's exhilaration. The simultaneous plots and the differences in the social class of the characters are clearly differentiated by the use of cross-cutting from one melody to another (listen to the Baker and Baker's wife's duet) and by the harmonies. In Jack's melancholy first solo, he is not even allowed to rhyme, while Cinderella for the most part inhabits a magic musical land evoking Ravel's ballet *Mother Goose*. The

Princes sing an elegant barcarolle to cello accompaniment, while the Baker and Baker's wife's "It takes two" reveals them as Sondheim suburbanites steeped in the Broadway idiom of the 1950s and early '60s. The stepsisters are only allowed to babble, while Little Red Ridinghood has a forceful march. Both of the wolf's choruses have a melodic shape like blues, but he shifts from sounding like Ravel's beast to a Broadway con man. The Narrator/Mysterious Man speaks in rhythm but virtually without singing. The Witch, as the most complex character, has a range of expression from rap to lamentation reminiscent of Puccini.



Bernadette Peters as *The Witch*, Original Broadway cast

Performance requires singing-actors who move constantly. Amplification is designed not to artificially increase volume but to allow the actors to articulate text without loud singing. The musical message is carried jointly by the text and melodic line; never, as happens in opera, is the text allowed to disappear into the score. So the listener has the opportunity to capture many details, and should take everything at face value so as not to

miss anything. Sondheim said that to him and Lapine, the giant was just a giant. The "deep meaning" is only going to emerge after multiple hearings.

The twilight of enchantment. *Into the woods* appeared in the 1980s, a decade after the poems of Anne Sexton in *Transformations*, captured in the opera by Conrad Susa, and a popular book of interpretation by Bruno Bettelheim, brought fairy tales back into American popular culture. This is reflected in the text to *Into the woods*, where the psychology of parent-child relationships as well as archetypes are in the foreground. But the sacrifice of the Narrator to the giant in Act Two suggests Sondheim's and Lapine's impatience with punditry, as the pressing



Cinderella and Prince, Act One, Original Broadway cast

problem of removing the giant focuses attention on real-world problems. Not unlike Hamlet, Jack and the Baker must take up arms. Even in Act One, the authors' answer to modern helplessness in the face of evil is to hand Little Red Ridinghood a knife!

Into the woods is a popular show, in spite of the lack of a happy ending, and its overturning of the conventions defined by films like Disney's classic *Snow White*. Humor is created by unexpected, apposite rhymes, word games, and gentle satire like Cinderella's transactional analysis of her interactions with the Prince. Having tried alienation, Sondheim works to keep the audience complicit with the show, and he insists on a musically cheerful finale where all the characters reappear in some guise, rather than closing with the anthem "No one is alone."

Sondheim calls himself a "Broadway baby," and is uncomfortable with operatic singing. However, since *Sweeney Todd*, productions of his works by opera companies have been common. His scores feature almost-continuous music and expand the application of



Sondheim and Lapine working on *Into the Woods*

compositional devices from classical music to theater well beyond the norm. Like the works of Weill and Britten, they offer a challenge to American would-be opera composers both to develop the genre and connect with audiences in a non-trivial way.

Upcoming Vocal Events

January 27, 3:00 pm (Mills)
Schubertiade with Martha
Fischer & Bill Lutes. Tickets \$17
adults, \$7 children.

February 14, 7:30 pm, (WI
Union Theatre) Vintage
Balentines-Valentines-Love
Songs Through Time. Four
Seasons Theatre. General Public:
\$28, Union Member/Non UW
Student: \$24, UW Faculty/Staff:
\$26, Youth: \$20, UW Students:
\$10

February 21-24, Into the Woods
(Memorial Union-Shannon Hall)
See page 1 for info.

February 23, 6:30 pm (Morphy)
Recital: Rhea Olivaccé, soprano
and faculty member at Western
Michigan University. African
American art songs and Negro
Spirituals. Free

April 6, 8:00 pm (Mills) UW
Concert Choir. Beverly Taylor,
conductor. Free

April 12, 8:00 pm (Mills) UW
Chorale. Bruce Gladstone,
conductor. Free

April 13, 7:30 pm (Mills)
Combined Choirs Concert.
Master Singers, University
Chorus and Women's Chorus.
Free

April 16, 7:30 pm (Music Hall)
Opera Scenes Concert. Free.

April 20, 7:00 pm (Music Hall)
Wisconsin Singers Spring
Showcase.

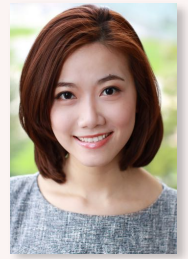
April 28, 7:30 pm (Mills)
Madrigal Singers. Bruce
Gladstone, conductor. Free.

May 3, 7:30 pm

May 4, 8:00 pm

May 5, 2:30 pm (Overture Hall)
Choral Union- Mahler's
"Symphony of a Thousand" with
the Madison Symphony
Orchestra. Beverly Taylor,
conductor (Tickets \$18-\$93)

Last fall, when we contacted the Opera Props awardees for biographical information, soprano Ph. D. candidate Jing Liu responded with a charming account of her journey from Chongqing, China, to Madison. Her story reflects the multitude of experiences that young singers must seek while developing their careers. We thank her for allowing us to share it with Opera Props members.



Chongqing, Jing Liu's hometown, is "widely acknowledged as the largest industrial and economic center in southwestern China. Towering mountains and roaring rivers facilitate the city's regional importance in defense, politics, trade, and logistics. Meaning "double celebrations" in Chinese, Chongqing has been a center of civilization for over 3000 years. Once an ancient military fort, it is now the hub connecting China's vast west and eastern coast. Known as one of China's "Three Furnaces", Chongqing is unbearably hot during the summer, with heat trapped by the surrounding mountains. It is pleasant to visit in other seasons. Also known as "Fog City", Chongqing is covered with a thick layer of fog for an average of 68 days a year. The fog gives the place an air of mystery. Locals compare the terrain of their "Mountain City" to San Francisco. The night view of Chongqing is like heaven onto earth. Two rivers reflect the city's lights, so the mountains of lights and rivers of lights become an integral part of the scene.

I was first introduced to classical singing in high school. I was stunned by the beauty of the human voice. Since then, I have never stopped singing. I was admitted to the top university in China – Peking University -- and participated in its student choir. Through performing various musical styles of different countries, I gained an understanding of diversified music genres, enhanced my passion for singing, and was motivated to continue my study abroad.

Five years ago, I came to the United States seeking a master's degree in Voice Performance in Syracuse University. It was risky but, looking back, it was the best decision I have ever made. I have studied opera and art songs to develop a flexible, powerful, and flowing voice. Performing as Lucy (*Lucy* by Tom Cipullo), Dido (*Dido and Aeneas*), and Adina (*Il Profumo dell'Amore* by Marco Giusto) at Syracuse University's Setnor Auditorium left a deep impression. I attended the 2014 Songfest Young Artist summer program and 2015 Songfest Professional program at the Colburn School - Los Angeles, CA and I successfully got the scholarship from Songfest 2015. I participated in the 2016 Druid City Opera Workshop at the University of Alabama. After acquiring my master's degree in Voice Performance, I continued working on a second degree in Voice Pedagogy.

Over these years, I have honed my ability to research and practice, and acquired an active and varied teaching style. I aim to develop a higher-level of solid, advanced vocal technique, comprehensive pedagogical methods, enhanced musicianship, more expressive performance skills, and a potent music research ability, so as to firmly establish my path to become a professional performer and teacher.

At UW my major professor is James Doing. In fall, I really enjoyed playing Ottavia in the *Coronation of Poppea*. Every moment in rehearsals and performance inspired me to continue pursuing a career to be an opera singer."



"One Tough Guy" is the title of a feature about **Kyle Ketelsen** in the February 2019 issue of *Opera News*. Madison has enjoyed many performances by the bass-baritone, most recently in the Madison Symphony's 2018 Christmas concert. An international star who appears at the Met, Covent Garden, Paris, and many other major venues, Ketelsen lives in Sun Prairie with his family. An Indiana University graduate, Kettelson and his wife Rebecca are very supportive of the UW Opera program, as members of Opera Props and attendees at the *La Boheme* pre-opera dinner. Kyle gave a master class for UW students last fall. He will make his role debut as the King of Scotland at the Lyric Opera of Chicago in March in Handel's *Ariodante*.

UW graduate **Brenda Rae** is also featured in the February issue of *Opera News*, where she is described as one of opera's most fearless singers. In the article, the Appleton native credits her voice teachers at UW for guiding her via assignments in multiple genres that showed the potential for development of her voice. It was *Sonnambula* that sent her into opera, where she has had extraordinary success in such varied operas as *La Traviata*, *Candide*, and *Lulu*. In September she collaborated for the third time with the French director Laurent Pelly in a production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* for Opera Philadelphia. Of their 2013 *La Traviata* in Santa Fe, *Opera News* wrote: "her immaculately sung, vividly acted Violetta [was] the centerpiece of a staging reconceived by Pelly for her particular talents." In March, she will join Kyle Ketelsen in *Ariodante* in Chicago.



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Contact us at uwoperaprops@gmail.com
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See archived newsletters at www.UWOperaProps.org/

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Opera will continue to thrive as a living art form only if the supply of operatic voices is continually replenished. By contributing to the education of young singers, and building audiences better able to appreciate them, members of Opera Props help to ensure the future of opera.

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List updated 1/14/19. UW Opera Props' fiscal year runs from June 1, 2018, through May 31, 2019.

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**A pre-opera dinner on
Friday, February 22, 2019
prior to University Opera and University Theatre's production of
Into the Woods by Stephen Sondheim**

Sponsored by UW Opera Props

Please join us and other opera enthusiasts for dinner before the opera!
Both the dinner and *Into the Woods* will be in the UW Memorial Union (800 Langdon St.)

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5:00-5:45 pm Fellowship

Cash bar that includes all top-self liquors for mixed drinks, a variety of bottled beers, house wine and soda.

5:45-7:00 pm Dinner Choices

Dinners include salad, dinner rolls, coffee and **cheesecake with berries** for dessert.

1. Beef short ribs, red wine demi, chive goat cheese polenta, seasonal vegetables.
2. Grilled vegetable stack, polenta, sautéed spinach, tomato, buffalo mozzarella, balsamic glaze, cilantro lime crème fraîche.

* The chef will accommodate specific dietary restrictions so please let us know in advance.

This meal is \$37 inclusive (the tip/tax are included in the price).

Guests assume all charges for drinks at the cash bar.

Two performers from *Into the Woods* will be joining us and speaking briefly about their roles and the production behind the scenes. See you there!

DINNER RESERVATION RSVP

**Please indicate Entrée #1 Beef Short Ribs
or Entrée #2 Grilled Vegetable Stack**

Dinner guest name _____ Entrée choice: 1. Beef Short Ribs or 2. Grilled Vegetable Stack

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Total check amount enclosed (payable to **UW Opera Props**) \$37 x _____ = Total \$ _____

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