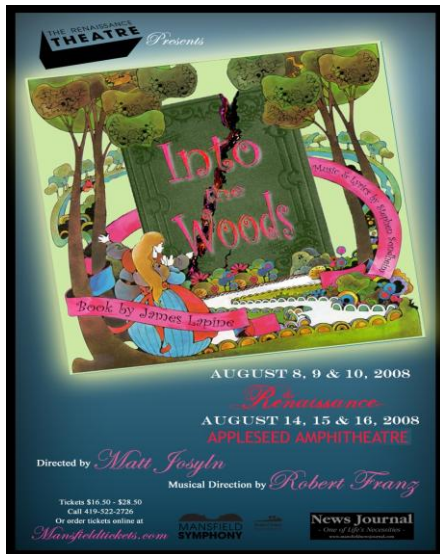


The Renaissance

2008-09: volume 1



Facts & Background

- o music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim
- o book by James Lapine
- o debuted in San Diego at the Old Globe Theatre in 1986
- o premiered on Broadway in 1987
- o Tony Awards, including Best Score, Best Book, and Best Actress in a Musical (Joanna Gleason)
- o Inspired by Bruno Bettelheim's 1976 book, *The Uses of Enchantment*
- o The musical intertwines the stories of several Brothers Grimm characters (Little Red Riding Hood, Jack and the Beanstalk, Rapunzel, and Cinderella) and follows them further as they suffer the consequences of their wishes. The main plot is tied together by an original story involving a Baker and his wife and their quest to begin a family.
- o Bernadette Peters' performance as the Witch, and Joanna Gleason's portrayal of the Baker's Wife, brought acclaim to the production during its original Broadway run.

From Director, Matt Joslyn

It's hard to believe that an entire year has gone by, and we're about to start rehearsals for the Renaissance Summer Musical 2008. Work on this production began shortly after last summer's *Cats* closed and, thus far, we've planned the process, engaged our designers and production staff, cast the show, finalized the designs, and put the many layers of logistics into action. It's amazing how much work is accomplished even before rehearsals begin. Whenever I am lucky enough to direct a production, I am humbled by the dedication and passion of the fantastic individuals that come together to make it happen.

Into the Woods is a special production for me because it happens to be one of my favorite Broadway musicals. The music, of course, is spectacular, as is the script written by Mansfield's own James Lapine. But it's the message, and its delivery, that I connect with the most.

To bring *Into the Woods* to the stage, Sondheim and Lapine have taken the classic storybook characters we've known our whole lives and brought them all together at the same place and time. As their stories intertwine, we begin to see ourselves within their seemingly simple lives. We all make wishes. We all struggle with our roles as parents or children (or both). We all make terrible mistakes and try to overcome them, resolve them, and live with them. And, while "happily ever after" may only live in fairy tales, somehow we're always okay in the end.

Of course, these themes are not new to us. One can't help listening to the Witches' Lament (careful the things you say/children will listen) without remembering Crosby, Stills & Nash's "Teach Your Children Well". One can't help listening to "Your Fault" ("what's important is who's to blame/somebody to blame") without considering who we've blamed in our own lives for our misfortunes. At the end of the day, these archetypal characters aren't so different from you and me.

So, as we set forth in rehearsal, I've decided that, for my part, this production is for my parents. They fed me on their dreams, I listened to what they said, I watched what they did, and I am who I am today because of them. They remind me that someone is always on my side, and "no one is alone".

On behalf of the over 100 individuals who have made bringing *Into the Woods* to life their dream this summer, we thank you. I hope the show will mean as much to you as it does to all of us. Enjoy.

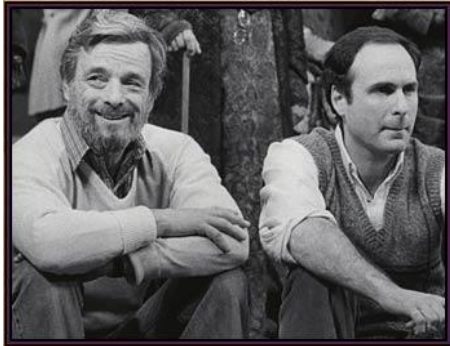
Composer Stephen Sondheim speaks exclusively about *Into the Woods*

After the success of *Sunday in the Park with George*, composer Stephen Sondheim and book-writer James Lapine re-teamed for *Into The Woods*, an alternately farcical and penetrating examination of the psychological underpinnings of classic fairy tales. The show's first act may be the most purely fun hour of theater Sondheim has ever been involved with, as it sends Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, and a childless couple on a set of intertwined quests that end ridiculously but happily. Then the second act starts, and the characters still feel faintly dissatisfied—at first in amusing ways, and later not so much. In some ways, *Into The Woods* treads into territory Sondheim hadn't covered since *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, with its recontextualizing of well-known archetypes and its broadly comic lyrics. But from the domineering maternal witch that drives the action to the climactic sense of isolation and fear, the show is quintessentially Sondheim. It may be the best place for novices to start, in that it's readily accessible yet also smart and moving.

Stephen Sondheim: In the mid 1980's, my collaborator, James Lapine, presented me with the idea - based on upon the book, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* by Bruno Bettelheim. I have to admit, I wasn't overly familiar with fairy tales. As a child, I was never a great reader. I read a few things - the Oz books, for instance, but I wasn't well acquainted with these stories.

Of course, the characters of the Baker and his wife are purely from Lapine's imagination. I always thought of it as though they were this rather ordinary couple from the Bronx - and they find there's a witch living next door and think, "My God, are we in the wrong place." I love that notion because it's so hilarious - that idea of an urban couple surrounded by fairytale characters. Now I'm not saying that James Lapine ever stated it that way, but it's very clear that's what he was going for. That's the frame of reference – there's this contemporary couple in these fairytale woods and everybody they look at is peculiar.

And then you have the Cinderella character. In the 500-plus years of that folktale, Lapine is the only person who figured out why she left the shoe. Every culture has a version of the Cinderella story, but no one ever suggested, until James, that she left the slipper behind on purpose. It's such a wonderful insight and makes the story alive. When you look at Cinderella as a story from the outside: she gets beaten up at home, has to clean the house and scrub the pots - then she goes to this ball, wearing a beautiful dress and looking gorgeous, and the handsomest and richest man in the kingdom falls in love with her – and she's got a problem? In every Cinderella story, she doesn't just go back to the castle. Why? What's the problem? Well, she's got a problem if she wants to be loved for herself. As far as I'm concerned, that explains the story. I credit James Lapine for providing the idea that each of the four characters – The Baker's Wife, Little Red Riding Hood, Jack, and Cinderella – has a moment of self-assessment. I would not have thought of that. They each have a moment to say this is what I've been through and this is what I've learned – or haven't learned – and now, I must go on. And that is the essence of folktales, isn't it?



Stephen Sondheim & James Lapine during rehearsal for *Into the Woods* (1987)

Facts about the collaborators from Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia

Lapine struck up an artistically profitable association with composer Stephen Sondheim. Beginning in 1983, the duo began work on *Sunday in the Park with George*, a project that found its inspiration in the unusual, Georges Seurat's pointillistic masterpiece "A Sunday on the Island of La Grand Jatte-1884." The collaborators fashioned a piece that spanned some 100 years, with act one culminating in a recreation of the famous painting and act two a contemporary send-up of the art world. *Sunday in the Park with George* was not a crowd-pleasing show in the vein of its contemporary *La Cage aux Folles* as it challenged audiences to examine the creation and nature of art as well as its acceptance by the masses. Cited by the Pulitzer committee for the award in drama in 1985, the show proved only a modest success, although it was preserved in a TV production that aired originally on Showtime and later PBS.

Lapine and Sondheim again turned to odd material for their next collaboration, *Into the Woods*. Although seemingly inspired by fairy tales, the show owed much to Bruno Bettelheim's *THE USES OF ENCHANTMENT* as the musical explored the darker territories of responsibility for one's actions that lay behind the "happily ever after" ideal. Effectively mounted by Lapine and well-cast with actor-singers, *Into the Woods* proved to be the pair's most successful collaboration (to date), earning the Best Book and Best Score Tony Awards. It too was filmed (this time with Lapine at the helm) for airing on PBS' AMERICAN PLAYHOUSE in 1991."

The Creative Team

Stephen Sondheim (composer/lyricist) is one of the most well known American musical and film composers and lyricists, winner of an Academy Award, multiple Tony Awards (seven, more than any other composer), multiple Grammy Awards, and a Pulitzer Prize. He has been described by Frank Rich in the *The New York Times* as "the greatest and perhaps best-known artist in the American musical theatre."

Sondheim Musicals:

1950s: *West Side Story*; *Gypsy*

1960s: *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*; *Anyone Can Whistle*; *Do I Hear a Waltz*; *Evening Primrose*; *The Race to Uрга*

1970s: *Company*; *Follies*; *A Little Night Music*; *The Frogs*; *Pacific Overtures*; *Side by Side by Sondheim*; *Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*

1980s: *Marry Me a Little*; *Merrily We Roll Along*; *Sunday in the Park with George*; *Into the Woods*

1990s: *Assassins*; *Putting it Together*; *Passion*; *Saturday Night*; *Bounce*

James Lapine was born in Mansfield, Ohio. He is a leading playwright and stage director best known for *Twelve Dreams*, *Table Settings*, *March of the Falsettos*, *Falsettoland*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Into the Woods*, and *Passion*. His film directing credits are *Impromptu*, *Life with Mikey* (starring Michael J. Fox) and *Earthly Possessions* (HBO).

A Second Summer Show!

The ensemble from *Into the Woods*, made up of middle school and high school students, will be performing an additional show on August 15 & 16 at 6:00 PM at the Appleseed Amphitheatre. This performance is truly a collaborative experience for the participants. The script, which is a compilation of improvisation exercises and writing prompts, was conceived and written by the ensemble. The cast drew on their imaginations and true-life experiences. Script development started in June and continued for six weeks. The ensemble then rehearsed their original piece and *Into the Woods* simultaneously. This process, where participants develop material gradually and naturally, is deeply organic, especially when the participants take responsibility for the performance's identity and efficiency. These are vital elements the education programs at the Renaissance believe in and stand for:

- participation in the creative process
- support of the imaginations of all ages
- the opportunity to develop skills
- the chance to perform on stage

