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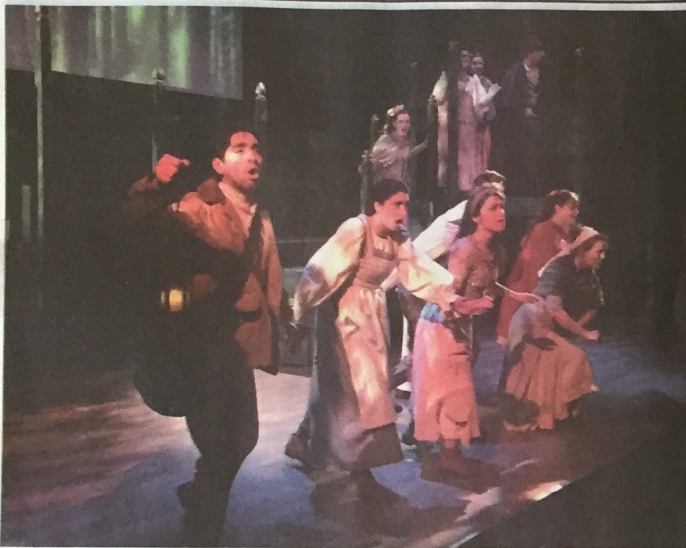
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ARTS, DINING & ENTERTAINMENT



HEARTWOOD'S "Into the Woods" takes you on a journey with your favorite fairy tale characters.

LISA KRISTOFF/Boothbay Register

Heartwood's 'Into the Woods': Playful, magical storytelling

By LISA KRISTOFF

"Once upon a time." When read or heard, this phrase, long associated with the fairy tales of childhood, lets us know we are about to be taken to a magical, far away land. The enchanting musical "Into the Woods," in which the tales of Rapunzel, Cinderella, Red Riding Hood and Jack in the Beanstalk are brought to life, begins this way — and the kingdom we visit is magical indeed.

"Into the Woods" is Heartwood's new production opening Thursday, July 13 at the Poe Theater in Newcastle. A delight from start to finish — due to a first-rate company of actors directed by Griff Braley — is summer entertainment not to be missed.

The minimalist, bi-level set with only a projected image of a forest in the background, leaves nothing to distract the audience's attention from the performers: Bradley Carter (Jack), Lainey Catalino (the fabulous Witch), Grae Experience (Cinderella), Andy Martinez (Cinderella's Prince and Father), Helena Farhi (The Baker's Wife), Nanette Fraser (Jack's Mom and the Giant), Kayleigh Tolley (Red Riding Hood), Deirdre Manning (Rapunzel), Joe Marx (The Baker), Verity Pryor-Harden (Cinderella's Mom and Stepmom), Stephen Shore (Jack's Father and the Narrator), Patrick Sylvester (Rapunzel's Prince and The Wolf), Genevieve Taylor (Cinderella's stepsister Lucinda), Ariel Sediman-Wright (Cinderella's stepsister Florinda and Granny), and Ethan Winglass (Milky White the cow and The Steward).

"Into the Woods" could serve as a cautionary tale, albeit a highly entertaining and amusing one, of what can happen when wishes come true. This is the ultimate fairy tale about choices and consequences — and how we are forever changed by them; love and loss, marriage and adultery; wishes and dreams, adventure and opportunity.

And now for the wishes ... The childless couple from "Rapunzel" are a baker and his wife who long for a family; Cinderella wants to go to the royal festival; Jack wishes his family's cow (and friend) would give them milk; Jack's mother wishes the same thing — and that her son wasn't a simpleton, and gold ...

The Witch, who lives next door to the Baker and his wife, has a most bountiful garden. She tells the couple that she put a curse on the Baker's family because his father was a thief. The Baker's mother craved greens of all kinds when she was pregnant with a second child (this Jack is shocked to learn as he was just a small boy at the time) and pleaded with her husband to get all he could for her. The Witch let him have the greens — in exchange for the child yet to be born. And, if the Baker's father had not also stolen her magic beans, the Witch would not have cursed the family ... but then we wouldn't have a good story now would we?

But, there is a way to break the curse all they must do is find a cow as white as milk, a cape as red as blood, hair as yellow as corn and slipper as pure as gold — in three days time, before the stroke of midnight.

Meanwhile, Cinderella desperately wishes to go to a royal festival being attended by her father and her hateful stepmother and stepsisters. These women her father brought into their lives scoff at the very idea of Cinderella at a festival; for starters she hasn't anything suitable to wear. Not to mention that her attendance would make the family the laughing stock of the kingdom.

Cinderella, not getting any help

from her father, decides to go into the woods to visit her mother's grave to see if mother can help from the great beyond.

And then there's Red Riding Hood, a compulsive eater with a saccharin sweet disposition. When Red started out for Granny's house in the woods she had food in the basket she carries, but when she meets the baker and his wife the basket is empty. After eating the bakery out of sticky buns and other sweet delights, and still needing to bring something to her old Granny, Red buys (yes buys) a loaf of bread — the last of the baked goods at the bakery, from the baker. The baker's wife is concerned for the girl wandering about in the woods, but Red confidently assures the couple she knows the way and won't get lost.

Before joining all the others into the woods on their own journey, the baker grabs his father's old coat. When he reaches into one of the pockets he discovers six beans, the Witch's missing magic beans. He puts them back in his pocket and the couple sets out.

Also in this village lives a well-meaning, sweet, but not so bright guy named Jack who lives with his mother and the family cow, Milky White, who is Jack's best friend. Jack's mother has had it with Milky White because she no longer gives the family any milk. She tells Jack he must take the albino bovine and sell her at the market. A sad Jack leaves with Milky White into the woods.

And so the magical journey begins and more characters are introduced starting with the Wolf, played by Patrick Sylvester with just the right amount of darkness. His cunning, laced with a measure of licen-

tiousness, and his overpowering appetite for the sweet young Red Riding Hood, are delightful. The dance he entreats Red into as he questions her about where she is going, among other things, is, well, a little creepy due to the girl's innocence and the Wolf's, um, appetites ... Great scene.

When it comes to great scenes in this production, audience members will look forward to seeing Lainey Catalino who is wicked good as the witch-next-door. Catalino has great stage presence and makes commanding use of the stage — just like every witch should! She is spellbinding.

The playful, skillful way this superb cast delivers the dialogue and lyrics really makes this a standout production. The actors fully embody their fairy tale characters, in costuming that is spot on, and have as enjoyable a time as their audience as together they journey "Into the Woods."

Pianist Sean Fleming heads up the live music in the show. He and his instrument are cleverly worked into a corner of the set, with other instruments behind the staging. Braley, as always, makes ultimate use of the limited stage space of the Poe Theater. But, it is that intimacy of space that draws Heartwood's audiences into the moment. It is an intimacy that works well with storytelling, including those that begin with "Once upon a time."

"Into the Woods" continues July 19-22 at 7:30 p.m. Please note that Wednesday is sold out. Tickets: Adult/\$30 and \$5/ students. Purchase through Heartwood, box office at 207-563-1373 or website: www.heartwoodtheater.org.

The Poe Theater is located at 81 Academy Hill Road in Newcastle.



GRACE EXPERIENCE (Cinderella) prepares to entreat her deceased mother into helping her get a dress for the royal Festival not knowing she is soon to meet The Baker (Joe Marx).

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