



COASTAL JOURNAL

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REVIEW: Spot on performances in Heartwood's 'Into the Woods'

NEWCASTLE — Heartwood Regional Theater presents Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's Tony Award-winning show "Into the Woods" tonight through July 22. A modern classic, "Into the Woods" premiered on Broadway in 1987. While it's not the "perfect" musical from a formulaic perspective, like "Guys & Dolls," it is known to be, as the press release suggests, "a musically sophisticated epic fairy tale ... suitable for all ages."

At 90 minutes, Act One is a complete story in itself and we get the happy ending desired by the fairy tale characters. We get to know these characters in a way slightly different than the stories that we've grown up with; fun little twists in storyline, modernization of costuming and language.

Act Two is much darker,



Photo by Jenny Mayher

"Into the Woods" opens tonight at Poe Theater in Newcastle.

characters come to brutal "off stage" deaths left and right. While watching, I realize I don't love the second act and wish it was not a thing. This is not due at all to this particular production, which is staged well, full of talented folks and

amazing music. Sometimes - that's what you want, to finish the show with everyone riding off happily into the sunset. With "Into the Woods" you have to deal with the giant.

As I sit contemplating what lessons the creators want me



STAGE DOOR DIVA

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to learn from Act Two, there are some truly beautiful moments. Scenes where characters who were caricatures now show more depth, particularly the Baker, played by Joe Marx. There are also some really lovely numbers ("No More," "No One Is Alone," "Children Will Listen") that reel me back in. I found myself enthralled to

the end by the stunning sound quality and the clear, strong, un-miked voices in the intimate space of Poe Theater.

Many of the strong ensemble cast are professionals from around the country. All have considerable skills and stage presence. Lainey Catalino of Brunswick, as the witch,

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is consistent and bold in her unique presentation and cadence. Grace Experience is a heartfelt and compelling Cinderella. From the narrator to the cow, portrayals are spot on.

You know before the play begins that the focus is on the characters, story and music. You see a very bare set of multi-level platforms painted forest green with gold finials

atop. Patrick Sylvester, portraying a Prince and the Wolf, is really quite mesmerizing as the latter, moving deftly from platform to platform. That's it - the set, a large back-lit projection screen and a grand piano.

Led by Director Griff Bralley, choreographer Michelle Bruckner, vocal director Beth Preston and music director Sean Fleming, the cast and the music present all the pieces of the story you need.

"Into the Woods" ends with

a re-configuring of families, a re-adjusting of desires, another happy ending — just not as happy for some of the characters who no longer exist by the end of Act Two. (If you could hear my tone, it would include a wry smile)

"Into the Woods" runs July 13 through 22, in the Parker Poe Theater at Lincoln Academy. Student tickets are \$5, adults \$30, except Wednesday, July 19, which is "\$20 night." For more information, visit

www.heartwoodtheater.org or call 563-1373.

Tamara Lilly is a Woolwich native with 30-plus years as performer, tech, producer, director, teacher, board member and staff at com-

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