

Theatre Orangeville's 'Into the Woods' brings life lessons and laughs

By Joshua Drakes

Theatre Orangeville's Young Company brought their A-game on July 24 with *Into the Woods*, their latest musical production.

During the summer months, a shift takes place at Theatre Orangeville. The theatre is between main seasons, summer camps are underway, and the spotlight turns to a different group of performers: the Young Company.

Led by Theatre Orangeville staff, these youth performers make use of the theatre's professional resources to stage a full-scale production.

That was on full display during the premiere of *Into the Woods* on July 24.

Into the Woods is a fairy tale in theory. In reality, it blends classic stories like Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Jack and the Beanstalk, Rapunzel and more.

The first act follows these familiar tales for the most part, but they quickly begin to diverge. The stories intertwine, with characters interacting directly, cooperating and clashing as they pursue their dreams and happily ever afters. Fortunately for everyone involved, those happy endings are achieved.

But the second act is where the story truly takes on a life of its own.

Into the Woods explores what happens after happily ever after, deconstructing fairy tale endings and forcing its characters to question whether their wishes and dreams are truly making them happy.

Friendships are tested, romances are strained, and in the end, not everything is quite as it seems.

That's what makes *Into the Woods* a must-see for anyone who holds fairy tales dear.

The acting performances are well above what many would expect from a youth performing company.

There were moments I forgot I was watching kids on stage.

The singing was clearly the production's strongest aspect. Every performer brought a distinct style to their role, ensuring no two musical numbers felt alike. Some performances were soft and graceful, such as Cinderella's, while others were commanding and antagonistic, particularly the Witch's.

Each performer approached their character with nuance and care, and it showed throughout the production.

The ensemble numbers were equally impressive. Several songs featured overlapping dialogue and rapid-fire exchanges between multiple cast members, moments that could easily have descended into chaos without exceptional timing.

The opening and closing musical numbers, featuring the full cast, were the best examples of this.

That level of coordination is no easy feat, but the Young Company pulled it off time and again.

The stage movement and choreography were equally impressive.

Even with more than a dozen performers on stage, the cast moved fluidly and in sync, demonstrating the meticulous planning and rehearsal that went into the blocking and choreography. Props were handled efficiently, moving on and off stage seamlessly.

At no point did it feel like any performer was overshadowed or blocked, even during the busiest scenes.

The set design neatly rounded out the production and was a perfect example of accomplishing a great deal with a simple concept.

Tree silhouettes, elevated platforms and a colourful backdrop, combined with effective lighting, music and performances, created all the production needed while leaving room for the audience's imagination.

A baker's house, Rapunzel's tower and, of course, the woods were all clearly established despite the set itself changing very little beyond a handful of props.

The only issue, and it's a minor one, was some audio balancing. At times, the music and microphone levels made certain song lyrics difficult to hear.

Taken together, Into the Woods was a fantastic production that showcased the raw talent of these young performers.

They demonstrated a level of range and confidence beyond their years and should be immensely proud of such a polished performance.

Into the Woods was a must-see for theatre lovers of all ages. It's an ambitious production that asks a great deal of its cast, and Theatre Orangeville's Young Company rises to the challenge with confidence, heart and remarkable talent.

Anyone looking to support local theatre while seeing the next generation of performers showcase their skills would be well served by taking a trip Into the Woods to see the next Young Company performance.