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Export date: Sat Sep 12 14:09:50 2026 / +0000 GMT

Theatre Orangeville?s Young Company set to premiere production of Into the Woods

By Joshua Drakes

Theatre Orangeville's Young Company is heading Into the Woods this summer, bringing fairy tales and their consequences to life on the stage as they explore classic tales through song.

Running July 24 to 27 at Theatre Orangeville, Into the Woods reimagines some of literature's most recognizable fairy tale characters, weaving them into a single narrative. While audiences may be familiar with the characters, the production takes a different approach from the traditional fairy-tale formula, exploring what happens after wishes come true and examining the consequences that follow.

Rather than ending with a conventional happily-ever-after, Into the Woods challenges audiences to consider the complexity of its characters and their choices. Throughout the production, seemingly simple stories become interconnected as characters pursue their dreams, confront unexpected outcomes and learn that every action has lasting consequences.

For the cast, that complexity is part of what made the production so appealing.

?Into the Woods is not like any other show,? a Young Company member said. ?Most of the time, musicals will have this big happy ending, and you can normally predict, alright, beginning they have an issue, they solve it, happy ever after. But with Into the Woods, it is very bittersweet. It's again actions and consequences... it's unlike any other show, and I think it's very special, and it should be shown as often as it can.?

Performers described the musical as one that offers something different from a typical family show, with layered storytelling that allows audiences to interpret its themes in different ways depending on their own experiences. Familiar fairy tales provide an accessible starting point, but the production delves deeper into questions about responsibility, morality and the realities that follow achieving one's goals.

The music itself presents another challenge. Sondheim's intricate score is known for its rapid-fire lyrics, demanding harmonies and carefully crafted musical motifs, requiring performers to master technically difficult material while conveying the emotional depth behind every scene.

The show's structure also gives nearly every performer a chance to shine. Instead of revolving around a single protagonist, Into the Woods follows multiple storylines simultaneously, allowing each character to play a meaningful role in moving the story forward.

?Every single character in this show is important in some way, shape, or form,? a Young Company member said. ?Whether it be following them in a lot of the scenes, or they are the one person that you might think is not really super important, but then they do something that changed the entire course of the story.?

They added, ?I feel like Into the Woods is a really good show for having everyone in the cast feel like they're doing something really important, they're contributing to the show, and they are making the show better.?

The approach is reflected in the casting, with several performers taking on multiple roles throughout the production. Switching between vastly different personalities ? from fairy tale heroes to villains and comic characters ? has challenged the young actors to develop distinct performances while helping create the production's expansive world.

The production also emphasizes ensemble work. Although individual characters each have defining moments, cast members say the musical relies on everyone working together to tell the story, making collaboration as important as any single performance.

Bringing a production of this scale to life is no small undertaking.

Preparation for the show began months before rehearsals officially started. Theatre Orangeville's production team began planning late last year, securing performance rights, assembling the creative team and developing the production schedule before moving into set, costume and design work. Once rehearsals began, the cast worked through an intensive four-week process to transform the musical from auditions into a fully staged production.

The production is the culmination of Theatre Orangeville's annual Young Company program, which brings together performers from students entering Grade 7 through graduating high school students.

Unlike some theatre camps, Young Company is designed to replicate the experience of mounting a professional production. Participants audition for roles, work alongside industry professionals and rehearse under the same expectations found in professional theatre, all while developing their acting, singing and stagecraft.

This year's production was also shaped by the participants themselves. Organizers invited the young performers to pitch shows they were interested in tackling before ultimately selecting Into the Woods, recognizing both the enthusiasm for the musical and the opportunity it offered to showcase the cast's abilities.

For many participants, Young Company has become more than a place to perform. Returning cast members describe it as a welcoming environment where friendships form across age groups and experienced performers support newcomers.

?That belonging is the biggest reason why I love Young Company so much,? one Young Company member said.

?I keep coming back every year, because on the very first day I spent with Young Company three years ago, I remember being so scared that I was going to be on the outskirts and I wasn't going to enjoy myself, and as soon as I walked in, there was a big circle of people, and someone came and invited me, we sat and we talked in a big circle.?

?From that day, this became my second home. It's so inclusive and welcoming for anybody, no matter where you're from, how old you are. Without this company, I never would have met some of my closest friends,? they added.

As opening night approaches, audiences can expect a production that combines familiar fairy tales with thought-provoking storytelling, challenging music and the collaborative energy of a cast working together to bring Into the Woods to life.