



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Starmaker  
Production : Into The Woods Junior  
Date : 21/10/2022  
Venue : The Alan Cornish Theatre, Oakwood Centre  
Reviewer : Cate Naylor

---

Show Report

Thank you for inviting me to your performance of Into the Woods Jr and to the director and your chairman for making me feel so welcome.

Into the Woods Jr simplifies the retelling of the Brothers Grimm fables whilst retaining much of the flavour of the longer version. A Sondheim musical was a brave and challenging choice for a youth group production and credit goes to the young people for the hard work they obviously put in to learning the complex lyrics and difficult melodies.

**Oliver Milligan** (The Narrator and Mysterious Man) as the narrator, guided us through the story with a mixture of spoken and singing lines. Oliver had good diction, but taking care not to drop volume, when sat with your back to the audience will improve your performance and ensure that your words are not lost.

**Oliver Widdis** (The Baker) gave a good performance as the nervous baker trying to please his determined wife. He captured the baker's good-hearted character as he tried to do what was right. Oliver had a clear singing voice with good expression and dynamics.

**Ami-Jane Jackson** (The Baker's Wife) had a lovely character and facial expressions capturing her dominance over the baker and drawing the audience's attention to her when she was onstage. She had good volume in her spoken lines and sang sweetly with nice tuning.

**Livy Webb** (The Witch and Cinderella's Mother) gave a stand-out performance as the Witch. Sondheim's lyrics for her character are fast-paced and complex and she pulled them off with ease. She had a strong singing voice and was extremely expressive with moments of power in the "Witches

Rap” contrasted with much more tender moments in “Stay with Me”. Her characterisation was spot on, starting aggressive, sarcastic, and powerful and becoming gentler and more desperate when she realised that she was losing Rapunzel. I was also impressed that she maintained her bent posture well and still managed to project out to the audience.

**Florence Wood-Blagrove** (Little Red Riding Hood) displayed great stage presence and was appropriately pushy and loud but with a cheekily adorable side. She had lovely facial expressions and comic timing. She sang well and I enjoyed her song “I know things well” and her little dance with the wolf.

**Ari Watts** (The Wolf and Florinda) as the wolf, Ari was a little bit scary, and obviously dishonest as she pretended to be Granny with a view to eating Red Riding Hood. She moved well on stage and had a fun dance with Red Riding Hood. Although the wolf’s costume came adrift in the dance, and she was a little distracted, she still gave a good performance and didn’t lose step.

**Max Davison** (Jack) gave another stand out performance as Jack. He had good stage presence and great comic timing and with some witty one-liners which he delivered very well. He confidently started the second act from the auditorium and was comical as he asked, “has anyone seen my cow?” He sang confidently, and with a good voice.

**Olive Hollidge** (Jack’s Mother and Cinderella’s Stepmother) delivered good characterisation of Jack’s overworked Mother who is trying to make ends meet and is frustrated by her son’s stupidity for selling the cow for a few beans. She had a strong spoken voice and projected well.

**Ellie Burman** (Cinderella) was appropriately clumsy and awkward, desperate to go to the festival and then disappointed when she got there. She sang with clarity and with a nice tone but was a little less assured with her tuning at the end of her big solo.

**Charlie Kendall** (Cinderella’s Prince and Granny) and **Findlay Pearson** (Rapunzel’s Prince and Cinderella’s Father) were very funny in their parts as the flamboyant and conceited posing princes. Taking care not to overplay the humour but to rely on their natural comic timing will improve their

performance. Both boys' comedic performance of the song "Agony" lamenting how difficult it is to be a prince in quest of a fair maiden was well done and they acted well and sang with expression.

**Paige Reilly** (Rapunzel) contrasted her meekness when stuck in the castle with confidence as she stood up to her stepmother and left her for her prince. She had a sweet, tuneful voice and a lovely tone.

## **Creatives**

**Katie Upton** (Director) This was a brave choice for a youth group musical particularly with so many new members and Katie had obviously worked hard with the youngsters to understand their characters and to give in the most part confident performances. Katie had designed a simple set and the small performance space was used effectively. I liked the tree trunks which were used to provide different acting spaces and for the unseen characters to speak behind. The use of a multi-level set gave some interest to the acting space doubling as Rapunzel's tower and the steps for the castle. One thing to think about that would have been beneficial would be to light the narrator when he was sat with the audience and Jack when on the balcony so that the audience could see them. The choreography was simple, effective, and well-rehearsed, the choreographer was not credited so I am assuming that Katie did this too.

Most importantly, the youngsters looked as if they were enjoying themselves which as a director is so important, well done.

**Amy Bingham** (Musical Director) (MD) had evidently worked hard with the young cast, to teach them Sondheim's syncopated and rhythmic style. This difficult music was better suited to the more confident and experienced singers, but all the group had clearly put in a lot of time to learn and perform the songs.

**Vicki Widdis** (Producer, Costumes and Properties) With such a lot of elements to co-ordinate for this production, I am sure that the directing team were pleased to have Vicki to help them run the production smoothly. As many of the cast were new to the group, having an experienced producer

backstage to help with costume changes and ensuring that the right properties were taken on stage at the right time, must have been a great help.

The costumes were well sourced adding colour and aesthetics to the production. They were all realistic and appropriate and with the exception of the wolf who had a bit of a wardrobe malfunction on the night I watched, well-fitting and comfortable.

The properties were plentiful and enhanced the set. I particularly liked the bakery goods, the flower decorations around the set and of course wonderful Milky White the cow.

**David Parsonson** (Stage Manager) The back-stage work was handled well and the movement of Milky White the cow was perfectly timed coming both off and onto the stage. David kept the backstage area clear for the very many entrances and exits ensuring that the cast were safe at all times.

**Tom Horrax** (Sound) The sound effects were on cue and the recorded accompaniments were timed well for the singers. The sound was not always well balanced and on occasions, it was difficult to hear the more diffident singers over the music.

**Eventu** (Lighting) The lighting was well planned, controlled and executed meaning that the actors were in the most part well lit. I have already mentioned that lighting the two actors in the audience would have been a good addition to the lighting plot. The red wash for the death of the wolf worked very well and the spots were well placed and appropriate.

**Friends of Starmaker** (Makeup & Hair Design) The makeup and hair was well done and there were some magnificent wigs!

**Sue Costello** (Matron) and **Friends of Starmaker** (Chaperones) As always with the group you have a good group of chaperones under the direction of Sue to ensure the safety of the youngsters.

**Gemma Wilson** (Programme) produced a glossy 20-page programme which was clear to read and included a lovely introduction from the Chairman and your Patron. I was pleased to see photographs plus interesting bios for all of the cast, Director and MD.

Thank you once again for inviting me to your show and I look forward to your next production.

*Cate*

NODA London District 13 Representative

A message from our NODA Youth Co-ordinator

*Thank you very much for inviting me and my husband to see your production of Into the Woods Jr. What a brave choice of show for a relatively young cast. I felt that the cast rose to the challenges that a Sondheim musical present, something many adult groups would not take on. The lyrics and difficult timings had been well learnt, especially as it was performed to backing tracks without the benefit of a 'live' Musical Director in the front to offer help and encouragement, especially at the more difficult times. The show came across as well rehearsed with slick entrances and exits and good synchronized head moves and simple dance steps. Well done everyone in the cast, with special mention to Livy Webb for a focused and mature performance as Witch and to Max Davison who shows a great deal of promise with great timing and sense of comedy as well as a good singing voice.*

*Wishing you well with your forthcoming shows and I hope to see you all again very soon.*

*Annie Hertler-Smith  
Youth Coordinator  
NODA London*