

## Into the Woods, YAOS at Westlands, Yeovil



THE first word that comes to mind is “triumph”. If anyone was concerned that Yeovil Amateur Operatic Society would find the transition from its traditional home at the Octagon to the temporary setting of Westlands, built as a sports and social club and promising challenges as great as does Stephen Sondheim’s music, don’t

worry about a thing.

Director Tash Moore, assisted by Sheila Driver, and MD Matt Holman-Holmes took a long look at the wide open space of Westlands, and devised a way to ensure dramatic tension, theatrical thrills and the sound of a live band without an orchestra pit, and also to involve the audience in the action. Westlands, with its flat seating area in front of the wide stage and its flexible tiered seating behind, won’t ever be as comfortable as the Octagon, but this show has demonstrated that anything is possible, with enough talent and determination.

It’s not the first time that YAOS has tackled Sondheim – Sweeney Todd has had their attention in 1999 and 2018 – but Into the Woods is another matter. Its psychologically brilliant story, weaving Grimm Fairytales into a coherently moral story about parents and children and the dangers of saying too much, is timeless relevant. But the complexity of both music and lyrics mean that perfect timing and diction are absolutely necessary, and that can be a big ask for an amateur company.

No problems here. Matt H-H led his 11-strong band behind side flats masquerading as trees and towers, and a few portable props set the scene as the familiar characters set off Into the Woods to face their fears and discover themselves. The brilliant cast includes some YAOS favourites and some newcomers to the company, and they do Sondheim proud. This is an ensemble piece in which everyone has a moment, as the Baker’s Wife would put it.

The baker (Matt Thompson-Burrows) and his wife (Charlie Wood, straight from her cameo Geraldine, Vicar of Dibley, performance at Strobe Theatre on Saturday) long to have a child, but they are cursed by the witch from next door (Sarah Westaway), whose vegetables were stolen by the baker’s father. She’ll only lift the curse if the childless couple find a cow as white as milk, a cape as red as blood, a hair as yellow as corn and a slipper as pure as gold – and in three nights only. So here we have Jack (Matt Parker) and the Beanstalk, Little Red Riding Hood (Izzy Macgregor), Rapunzel (Hannah Long) and Cinderella (Leah Driver) for the taking.

Throw in a couple of princely brothers (Harrison Waterhouse and Seb Watts), Jack’s scene-stealing mother (Jennifer Holland-Brewer), the vulpine Jay Westaway and his grandmotherly prey (Emily Wilson) and the stage is set for romance, violence, threats, disobedience and a growing understanding of the importance of companionship.

It was a huge undertaking for YAOS, to lead the way for big shows into the unknown world of Westlands, and it has paid off. Just get the vehicle access sorted, and the venue should be home to some memorable theatrical experiences in the coming months. And get a ticket for Into the Woods if you can.

GP-W

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*“I have learned over the years that when one’s mind is made up, this diminishes fear.”*

– Rosa Parks

*“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”*

– Barack Obama

*“The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them”*

– Ida B Wells

*“Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble”*

– civil rights leader John

Lewis

*“Whatever is bringing you down, get rid of it. Because you’ll find that when you’re free... your true self comes out.”*

– Tina Turner

*“Never be limited by other people’s limited imaginations”*

– astronaut Dr Mae Jemison

*“Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly.”*

– Langston Hughes

*“I am lucky that whatever fear I have inside me, my desire to win is always stronger.”*

– Serena Williams

*“Hate is too great a burden to bear. It injures the hater more than it injures the hated.”*

– Coretta Scott King

*“Truth is powerful and it prevails.”*

– Sojourner Truth

*“The soul that is within me no man can degrade.”*

– Frederick Douglass

*“If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.”*

– Shirley Chisholm

*“My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together.”*

– Archbishop Desmond Tutu

*“For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”*

– Nelson Mandela

*October is Black History Month*

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