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## **INTO THE WOODS**

**Multiple Sclerosis Society of SA & NT Inc**  
**Odeon Theatre, Norwood**  
Until 26 February

Review by Simon Slade

Fairy tales normally have broad-brush plots and one-dimensional characters. That's not where you would normally expect to find composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim. The Age newspaper once said that the works of Sondheim would still be performed when Andrew Lloyd-Webber was just a footnote in the history of musicals.

In "Into the Woods" Sondheim combines the tales of Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstalk, Rapunzel, Little Red Riding Hood and Snow White to create a complex story based on simple elements.

Directors David Lampard and Joshua Penley have succeeded in bringing out a number of the multiple dimensions in both the text and the characters. They have not lost the sense of fun present in Act I, and foreboding in Act II.

This is an ensemble piece, with no real chorus, and the performers work well together. Joshua Penley, as Jack, stands out. His acting and his singing were both good, and his comedy was fresh and funny. The scene where he farewells the cow was hilarious.

Trish Spence as the Witch gives a real sense of menacing, as opposed to just being a caricature. She is in fine voice and even manages the transformation scene well. David Lampard as both the Wolf and Cinderella's Prince has some of the funniest moments in the whole show. He plays the comedy expertly and clearly loves it. Unfortunately, he ran into a couple of timing problems with songs, and was struggling at the extremes of his range.

On opening night a number of cast members struggled with lines. There were also problems with timing in a few musical numbers. The orchestra is not visible – the Odeon has no pit – and the cast is able to see the musical director on a video screen. The orchestra is quite tight under the musical direction of Ian Boath.

David Lampard and Paul Talbot's set is a masterpiece of storybooks. Other pieces like the cow and the horse are created in the style of a pop-up book. Tim Ides scenic art is spot on. If only the lighting had done it justice! The focus was sloppy and cues were a problem on opening night.

Those sorts of problems took the edge off what could be a stunning production.