INTO THE WOODS

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Begins August 14th
Performing in the Alexandra C. and John D. Nichols Theatre
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**THE WRITERS THEATRE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**
Dear Friends,

Welcome to the 2019/20 Season at Writers Theatre!

To begin this exciting year of transformative, transporting stories, we are delighted to invite you into *Into the Woods*. For this immersive musical masterpiece by Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine, you will no doubt notice that the Nichols Theatre has gone through a bit of a transformation itself to become a theatre “in the round.” We hope this new seating configuration encourages you to lean forward and engage as we follow fairy tale characters, both familiar and new, along their journeys of discovery.

In this issue of *The Brief Chronicle*, you will get to know a little bit more about director Gary Griffin’s long history with the works of Stephen Sondheim. Reflecting on his successes in Chicago and beyond, Gary opens up about his first impressions of *Into the Woods* and explains why now is the right time to put his stamp on one of Sondheim’s most well-known musicals.

Next, we will explore the significance of fairy tales and storytelling, comparing parallel versions of common archetypes across cultures and through time. We’ll also offer a profile of the close partnership between Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine, the creators of *Into the Woods*, and reveal some interesting facts about the genesis of this iconic piece.

As one of the pillars of our Education program celebrates its 10-year anniversary, we’ll give you a glimpse into what it’s like to experience a final presentation of *THE NOVEL SERIES*, our in-school residency program. Developed by WT in collaboration with teachers and administrators in Chicago-area schools, *THE NOVEL SERIES* remains a flagship of our Education department and we invite you to celebrate a decade of this empowering student-driven program!

Don’t forget—we’ve got a full season of productions to entertain, enlighten and inspire you! A fresh adaptation of *A Doll’s House* by Henrik Ibsen will perform in the Gillian Theatre next, adapted by Sandra Delgado from the streamlined version that Michael created for Definition Theatre Company. The smart, simmering new play *The Niceties* by Eleanor Burgess continues the season in the Nichols Theatre, followed by Lydia R. Diamond’s romantic and twist-filled *Stick Fly*. Anna Ziegler’s *The Last Match* fills the Gillian Theatre with all the passion and tension of a U.S. Open tennis final, as the season closes with an enchanting finale from Chicago Tribune’s “Company of the Year,” Manual Cinema, who will use their theatrical prowess to create a motion-picture before your eyes in real-time with their celebrated *Mementos Mori*. If you have not done so already, you can guarantee tickets to all of these plays with a season package—contact the Box Office for more information!

We hope to see you at the Theatre again soon!

With deepest thanks and gratitude,

Michael
Kate
State of the Art

by Michael Halberstam, Artistic Director

Thank you so much for joining us for the first production of our 2019/20 season.

Back in the dark ages, before the internet and iPods and digital downloads, I used to scour the papers for news of album release dates. The best way to learn the dates was to call Tower Records and then call relentlessly on release day. Into the Woods was no exception. I was obsessive about my Sony Walkman and generally invested in a decent model. Much of my temporary work was in data entry and having access to WBEZ and music was essential to keeping me sane. During the daytime I worked as a temp and at night I would rehearse. I first purchased the cassette of the Into the Woods score, but wore it out fairly quickly and had to invest in an LP version soon thereafter. I listened to Into the Woods non-stop and learned all the lyrics, obsessing about the songs. Eventually I plucked up my courage and wrote to Mr. Sondheim, telling him what a difference he’d made to my life. He wrote back a lovely brief note telling me that my letter had come at just the right time.

So why Into the Woods here at Writers Theatre? Why now? For me, at least, the answer is simple and found in the lyrics of this wonderful musical’s most familiar song: “Careful the things you say, Children will listen!”

For as long as I have been reading, I have been obsessed by fairy stories; stories about magic and the ancient world’s various mythologies. As a child, I devoured stories of the Greek, Roman, Egyptian and Norse Gods and I read the Bible cover to cover. I still have a fondness for them all, and I am instantly intrigued by any movie or television show or novel that intelligently delves into this particular literary realm. (Phillip Pullman’s brilliant His Dark Materials trilogy took my breath away.) Although told in childish form, these stories are not entirely suitable for children. The Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Anderson stories are particularly brutal affairs frequently ending with gory consequences for straying from paths that were clearly laid out by figures of authority. This, of course, reflected the morality and social milieu of the times in which they were crafted.

Needless to say, when Into the Woods entered into my life, I was transported. Here was a fresh look at the fairy tale genre from a thrillingly contemporary perspective. The first half of the play embraces tradition and brilliantly interweaves a series of well-known stories, while introducing a brand-new one about a baker and his wife and their attempt to lift a curse placed on their family by a wicked witch. It’s delightful and frequently hilarious, and of course it has a wonderfully happy ending. But there is a brutality and a hard truth that underlines the structure of the first half, and when the narrator announces “to be continued” right
before intermission, the ground has been laid for an even richer and more complex piece of storytelling. And this is where both the book and the score really take flight. In the second act we are asked to question what it really means to live happily ever after. We are confronted with no-win situations. We take a look at the real-life progression of relationships that might not end in complete happiness and might even face the challenge of considerable loss. Most importantly we are asked to think about the impact that the narratives that surround us have on the next generation. We are especially asked to consider the consequences of our own actions when we pursue ‘happily ever after’ to the detriment of everything around us. We are asked to take responsibility for ALL of our choices in life and are encouraged to engage with the need to bridge the eternal generational divide. It’s worth pointing out that these are themes that will appear in a number of productions at Writers Theatre this season and, of course, mirror the national conversations that currently shape our lives. They are important conversations.

I can think of no better guide to lead this conversation than my friend and colleague Gary Griffin. I can also think of no better director for me to lean into as I return to acting after a 17-year hiatus. Gary has a gift for looking at musicals with a fresh and essential perspective. He looks at each staging as if it is a premiere and discovers the piece anew. I can’t understate the importance of this perspective. Often, an iconic production (usually the premiere), sets up a series of choices that stick with subsequent productions and become inseparable from the piece itself. By looking at each staging with present and essential eyes, Gary makes the production he is working on feel fresh, relevant and necessary. His work with Sondheim has been revelatory to say the least. His Passion, Sunday in the Park with George, Road Show and his Pacific Overtures were informative not only to the nature of the pieces themselves but to me personally in terms of what I learned about myself through watching them. If you’ve seen Into the Woods before, then this will be like seeing it again for the first time. If it’s your first foray into the show, then you’ll always remember this one. Gary has assembled a remarkable team to transport us all into Sondheim and Lapine’s astonishing leap of imagination. We are all in wonderful hands.

So we humbly request, as many of you are already familiar, that you please, please, please, don’t sit back and relax. Do lean forward and engage. Take a walk with into this new season and as we go Into the Woods. You’ll be so much happier on the other side.

Thank you again for your patronage. It is truly a privilege to make theatre for you and we do not take this responsibility or trust lightly.
PUTTING INTO THE WOODS IN THE ROUND

*Into the Woods* audiences will get to experience the Alexandra C. and John D. Nichols Theatre in a completely new way. The musical will be staged in the round, with a new seating bank created upstage specially for this production. As three recent Tony Award winners can attest—*Fun Home* (2015), *Once on This Island* (2018) and *Oklahoma!* (2019)—experiencing a musical in this format is exhilarating for both audience and artists.

From the very beginning of his conversations with WT staff and his design team, director Gary Griffin was determined to create a production of *Into the Woods* that could only be possible here. He had already staged a traditional proscenium production at The Muny in St. Louis four years earlier, and didn’t want to just adapt that version so it would fit the Nichols Theatre. Instead he wanted an original version that played to Writers Theatre’s core allegiances: the Word and the Artist.
With seating on all four sides of the Nichols Theatre in Scenic Designer Scott Davis’s stunning creation, the audience will be brought into even closer proximity to the action on stage. In true Writers Theatre fashion, instead of the focus being on the Woods, this production will be unquestionably centered on the Fairy Tale characters who venture there. 18 incredible performers, in tandem with 3 musicians, will prominently put the words and lyrics of creators James Lapine and Stephen Sondheim on display to a degree unlike anywhere else.

Every seat in the Nichols Theatre will offer a unique view from which to watch these fairy tales unfold, and Griffin has directed his large cast to use the playing space to its fullest potential. When playing in-the-round, actors are kept on the move so as not to have their backs to any portion of the audience for too long. And with 18 of them in total (tied with TREVOR the Musical for the largest cast in WT history), constantly entering and exiting from all directions as the plot thickens, there will always be somebody in full view to watch. Additionally, music Director Matt Deitchman and Sound Designer Chris LaPorte have created orchestrations and amplification that will fill the space with soaring vocals and beautiful accompaniment.

With all the different points of view on offer in the Nichols Theatre, this will be one trip Into the Woods you may find yourself wanting to make more than once!
Gary Griffin, inarguably, is one of the leading interpreters of the musical works of Stephen Sondheim for the stage.

The Chicagoan has been directing acclaimed productions of Sondheim’s work since the early 1990s. Now Griffin brings his love of the iconic lyricist/composer to Writers Theatre to direct perhaps Sondheim’s best known show, Into the Woods.

Hailing from Rockford, Illinois, Gary Griffin’s first experience with the works of Stephen Sondheim was during a summer in college when he worked at a summer stock theatre company in Wisconsin. The theatre was staging a production of Side by Side by Sondheim, a musical revue from 1976 that features songs from the composer’s career up until that point. Griffin remembers, “I knew West Side Story and Gypsy and Company but I didn’t know the rest very well. The production played two weeks and I must have gone at least six times because I was knocked out by the material.”

By senior year, Griffin was fully interested in directing and chose to stage a production of Sondheim’s A Little Night Music as an independent study project. It was one of the first musicals the young director ever helmed, and his love for the artform was solidified. Griffin moved to Chicago after college and began directing around town, most regularly at Drury Lane, Court Theatre, Apple Tree Theatre and Pegasus Players. The latter three companies were where Griffin was able to start directing Sondheim musicals professionally. He staged Assassins at Apple Tree in 1996, Company at Pegasus Players in 1997 and then a different Sondheim revue titled Putting It Together at Court in 1997.

Soon enough, Griffin would get to meet and collaborate with his idol. Sondheim’s very first musical, Saturday Night, which he had written with Julius J. and Philip G. Epstein
(also writers of the film *Casablanca*) based on their play *Front Porch in Flatbush*, was supposed to be produced on Broadway in 1954 but the production was cancelled after the lead producer died. Sondheim had moved on to work on *West Side Story* after the cancellation and the show was never produced. Decades passed before Sondheim gave permission for the show to be performed for the first time in London in 1997. Pegasus Players in Chicago, having staged many of Sondheim’s works, requested to stage the musical with Griffin as director. Having heard of Griffin’s success in Chicago, Sondheim agreed, saying as Griffin recalls, “I’ll let you do it in Chicago and we’ll orchestrate it there and I’ll do work on the book. I have two songs I never wrote for it.’ He came in, gave really great notes, saw his show for the first time.” The 1999 American premiere production at Pegasus Players gave Griffin his first taste of national attention, more of which was soon to come his way.

In 2000, Griffin joined the staff of Chicago Shakespeare Theater as their Associate Artistic Director. The company had just moved into its new home on Navy Pier with two theatre spaces, the Courtyard and the Upstairs Theatre. “I asked [Artistic Director] Barbara Gaines what her vision was for the studio space, and she said ‘honestly, right now, we’re figuring that out.’ So I started talking about what might be cool to do there and I proposed *Pacific Overtures* [Sondheim’s 1976 musical about imperial Japan]. I had wanted to do it for a very long time. I had pitched it to several theatres, and no one was interested. Barbara very quickly said ‘we’d love to do it’ and it turned out to be a crazy success.” The 2001 production got a rave review from *The New York Times* and Griffin took a version of the same production to London’s Donmar Warehouse two years later. The London run won the 2004 Olivier Award for Outstanding Musical Production. *Pacific Overtures* firmly established the place of musicals at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, and Griffin as a major force. He would direct many other Sondheim productions at CST over the years, including *Sunday in the Park with George* in 2002 and again in 2012, *A Little Night Music* in 2003, *Passion* in 2007, *Follies* in 2011, and *Gypsy* and *Road Show* both in 2014. During this very successful period in Griffin’s career, he also made his Broadway debut directing the original production of *The Color Purple*.

Despite this streak of productions, there was one Sondheim musical Griffin wasn’t pitching. “I never had great passion to do *Into the Woods*,” he confesses. “For a lot of reasons. One is that I like the show very much, but it gets produced a lot. Until I started to dig in and learn about it,
I hadn’t seen the challenges you see in other Sondheim pieces. It seemed easier. Which now I know is a stupid thing to say.” While directing at The Muny in St. Louis, Griffin remarked about the outdoor theatre that if he were ever to do Into the Woods, it would make sense for it to be there. The Artistic Director was listening and in 2015 he invited Griffin to direct the show for them, the theatre’s first ever Sondheim musical. “We had an amazing cast, and I had a great time. I loved learning about the show, my respect for it grew, but I was doing a big proscenium production. And I thought that’ll be what it is.”

After the astounding success of Parade at Writers Theatre two years ago, Griffin and Artistic Director Michael Halberstam started talking about other musicals the director could bring to Glencoe. “Michael suggested Into the Woods, so I spent a weekend reading the script and looking at Sondheim’s notes in [his book of lyrics] Look, I Made a Hat. It was the weirdest thing; I didn’t know this show at all like I thought I did. Reading it again was so fresh and so exciting. I’m sure it was because I was thinking about how it would land in WT’s space, but I had never really appreciated the stakes of the show, the extraordinary complications the characters face. It’s far closer to Sweeney Todd than I ever realized.”

Now Griffin is completely enamored by the musical he previously hadn’t thought much of. “I think that the language (both in terms of lyrics and music) is precise, sophisticated and about questions of what it means to be human. Sondheim believes in what an audience can grasp and can take on in a theatre. He writes for performers because he loves actors, and he writes difficult music because he respects them. When I think about the body of work at Writers Theatre it’s always about the value of the text. You choose plays with great respect for your audience, for their time, for their involvement. And that’s the essence of Sondheim. His shows are incredibly immersive.”

And even though rehearsal is still currently over a month away, Griffin is vibrating with excitement to get started. “I’m already in the zone, even though it’s a little early on this one. I haven’t done a Sondheim show in almost three years. I’m glad because every time I come back after a break, it kinda comes roaring. Between 2011 and 2016, I did eight productions. That’s a lot! It’s been good to have some perspective. I hope everyone has the experience with Into the Woods I did, which is I didn’t really know it and wow.”
What is a fairy tale?

The Czech writer Karel Čapek writes that “A fairy story cannot be defined by its motif and subject-matter, but by its origin and function... A true folk fairy tale does not originate in being taken down by the collector of folklore but in being told by a grandmother to her grandchildren, or by one member of the Yoruba tribe to other members of the Yoruba tribe, or by a professional storyteller to his audience in an Arab coffeehouse. A real fairy tale, a fairy tale in its true function, is a tale within a circle of listeners.”¹

One of the paradoxes of storytelling is that, on the one hand, a story is different every time you tell it and you can make it mean anything you want it to mean. On the other hand, there are no truly new stories. With Into the Woods, we have a story about storytelling: it tells us stories we already know and asks what they mean, what work they do for us, why we keep telling them and for whom.

The four fairy tales that make up the main plot of Into the Woods—Cinderella, Rapunzel, Little Red Riding Hood and Jack and the Beanstalk—are based on specific, nineteenth-century literary tellings. However, as Sondheim points out in his notes on the musical, “the tales we were dealing with exist in virtually every culture in the world.” Cinderella, in other words, is not just Cinderella, but also Aschenputtel (German), Ye Xian (Chinese), Chinye (West African), Rashin-Coatie (Scottish), Himegimi (Japanese), Mireleh (Ashkenazi Jewish), Domítíla (Mexican).

Settareh (Persian), and many hundreds more. The details of these stories might vary (the German Cinderella is helped by a magic tree planted on her mother’s grave, the Chinese Cinderella by a magic fish and then by the dead fish’s magic bones) but the human experiences they describe (a girl is rescued from her abusive family to live in luxury and happiness) remain constant.

There are two schools of thought as to why stories like Cinderella appear in so many different cultures: either all versions of a story are connected to a single, ancient version, which was disseminated orally and altered to suit the cultural circumstances of each storyteller, or fairy tales describe human experiences so universal that they are developed independently in every time and place. There is probably some truth to both of these proposals. A good story is durable. The folklorist Graham Anderson explains, “if a story is a genuine folktale or fairytale it will maintain most of its structure, intrinsic logic and basic identity for centuries or millennia on end. In the world of traditional storytelling...I have yet to encounter a wolf trying on the glass slipper.” A story that feels right will keep feeling right even as the world around those who are telling it changes.

But how can a story “feel right” to such a wide variety of listeners? In his notes on Into the Woods, Sondheim writes that he and Lapine were inspired by the explanation offered by psychoanalyst Carl Jung’s notion of the collective unconscious, and specifically the idea of universal archetypes. Fairy tales deal exclusively in archetypes: the Monster in a fairy tale is every monster, the Child in a fairy tale is every child. In the system used by folklorists to categorize types of stories, Rapunzel is called “The Maiden in the Tower,” Cinderella is “The Persecuted Heroine” and Jack and the Beanstalk is “The Boy Who Stole the Ogre’s Treasure.” Sondheim explains that this universality is why he has resisted symbolic readings of Into the Woods: the giant in this story does not stand in for “...AIDS...the atomic bomb, global warming or the
economic meltdown. To me and James, it is a giant. Enough said.” The Jungian critic Marie-Louise von Franz writes that “the fairy tale itself is its own best explanation; that is, its meaning is contained in the totality of its motifs connected by the thread of the story.” Fairy tales are not metaphors, but something simpler. They are the stories we tell in order to make real life make sense.

That said, although you know these stories, the versions you are familiar with are probably a little different from the versions you see on stage tonight. Why is Cinderella talking to a tree, where did her pumpkin coach go and what happened to Little Red’s riding hood? Some of the show’s unfamiliar elements come from the minds of Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine—The Baker and his Wife are entirely original characters—but many more are owed to another iconic writing duo: the Brothers Grimm.

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (1785-1863 and 1786-1859, respectively) were not the first scholars to collect folktales in a written anthology, however, what made their collection *Children’s and Household Tales* original was its fidelity to the traditional forms of these stories. The Brothers Grimm were deeply interested in documenting the literary traditions of a German folk culture which they saw as threatened by rapid industrialization. In his introduction to the first edition of *Children’s and Household Tales*, published in 1812, Wilhelm Grimm wrote that “[i]t is probably just the right time to collect these tales, since those who have been preserving them are becoming ever harder to find.”6 This conservationist attitude meant that the Grimms had no qualms about leaving in details that other fairy tale writers have found unsavory (or, well, grim) such as the moment when Cinderella’s stepsisters cut off pieces of their feet to try to get her shoe to fit.

In part because of Disney, and in part because of the modern distaste for dismemberment in children’s stories, the versions of these tales that most Americans are familiar with come not from the Brothers Grimm, but from French author Charles Perrault’s 1697 collection *Histories or Tales from Past Times, with Morals*. Despite the prevalence of Perrault’s versions, his tellings are actually far from the traditional oral versions of the stories on which they are based. Perrault wrote for an aristocratic, literary audience of both adults and children, during a period when retellings of folktales had become fashionable among the upper

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classes. Far from being an archivist of folk culture, Perrault emphasized préciosité, or refinement, in his writing.7

This difference in attitude is particularly clear in the differences between Perrault’s “Little Red Riding Hood” and the Grimms’ “Little Red Cap.” Whereas Perrault’s story ends with Little Red Riding Hood’s death followed by an injunction not to talk to strangers, the Grimms’ Little Red Cap is not only rescued from the wolf’s belly, but manages to kill the next wolf who comes her way. Likewise, as Sondheim points out, Perrault’s Cinderella is forced to leave the ball by the stroke of midnight or else be exposed as a fraud, but the Grimms’ more active Aschenputtel chooses to run away of her own accord. The question of why Cinderella might choose to run away from the thing she most wants was the inspiration for much of her characterization in Into the Woods.

However, the difference between Perrault and the Grimms is not all due to the latter’s interest in preserving tradition. The Grimms were also deeply concerned with making their stories morally instructive to children. While the violence in their stories may be shocking to modern parents, stories of misbehaved children coming to gruesome ends were very popular among nineteenth century parents and educators. The Victorians believed that all children were born wicked, stained by the curse of original sin, and had to be taught to be good with a pedagogy of fear. “Cautionary tales” for children were popular, and could be even more gruesome than the Grimms’ stories: a 1907 parody of the genre entitled Cautionary Tales for Children: Designed for the Admonition of Children between the ages of eight and fourteen years included titles like “Jim: Who ran away from his Nurse, and was eaten by a Lion” and “Matilda: Who told Lies, and was Burned to Death.”

The Grimms managed to produce a collection of tales much closer to the traditional oral versions than any of the previous written folktale collections, even if their versions were not as authentic as they claimed. Many of their stories are not uniquely or even originally German. And anyway, what would it even mean to tell an authentic or “correct” version of a fairy tale? Despite the Grimms’ dishonest claim that the stories in their collection are unique to Germany, trying to divide fairy tales along national lines is a misguided project. In the words of Angela Carter, “Who first invented meatballs? In what country? Is there a definitive recipe for potato soup? Think in terms of the domestic arts. This is how I make potato soup.”8

Despite the cultural fluidity of these stories, the Grimms’ effort to create an archive of specifically German stories began a tradition of national collections of fairy tales which has continued to
this day. *Jack and the Beanstalk*, the only story in *Into the Woods* not found in the Grimms’ book, comes from one such collection, the 1890 book *English Fairy Tales* by Joseph Jacobs. While it is true that the story about a beanstalk that serves as a ladder to the sky and a giant who says “Fee Fi Fo Fum” is unique to the British Isles, Jack and the Beanstalk is only one example of the widespread folktale type “The Boy Steals the Ogre’s Treasure,” which exists in dozens of cultures.

Fairy tales, then, operate on two levels: on the one hand, they are immediate because they represent the particular interests, anxieties and cultural mores of the moment in which they are told; on the other hand, they express human experiences so succinctly and timelessly that they continue to have meaning for each new generation. In rewriting these stories, Sondheim and Lapine have stayed true to their nature, which is to change. As the critic Carolyn Heilbrun writes, “Out of old tales, we must make new lives.”

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Opening spread: *Histories, or tales of past times*, London: 1729, by Charles Perrault (1628-1703). First known English translation of Perrault’s *Contes des fées*, better known as the tales of *Mother Goose*. 

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For both the characters and creators of Into the Woods, collaboration is key. After all, “No One is Alone.”

The collaboration between playwright James Lapine and lyricist/composer Stephen Sondheim seemed an unconventional one, given both were at different stages of their careers at the time and with different theatrical backgrounds. Lapine came from the Off-Broadway non-musical world while Sondheim was a Broadway musical veteran. However, finding common interest in the types of stories they wanted to tell, the two used their respective backgrounds to complement each other perfectly and created several classic musicals.

The seeds of the Sondheim/Lapine collaboration began in 1982, when Sondheim saw Lapine’s play Twelve...


Dreams about a case study of Carl Jung’s. Intrigued by Lapine’s blending of reality with fanciful imagination, Sondheim wanted to work with the younger writer. The sentiment proved mutual and their first collaboration was Sunday in the Park with George in 1984, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. After the success of their first collaboration, the two immediately set about finding another show to work on together. Sondheim suggested a musical in the vein of The Wizard of Oz. He loved the movie because the songs worked both to propel the story forward and as catchy stand-alone tunes of their own. However, Lapine worried that they would struggle to sustain a full-length fantasy story because, to borrow the very last line of Sunday in the Park with George, there were “so many possibilities.” In a fantasy story, anything is possible, so without a point to make the story could go absolutely anywhere. They had a genre they wanted to play with, but no content to drive it.

Lapine then suggested the idea of creating an original musical in the style of classic fairy tales, an idea both loved although it came with a new set of obstacles. Fairy tales are always short, so creating a new one as a two hour plus musical would not feel authentic. Fairy tale adaptations, such as Disney movies, use the original tale as a springboard and are still typically less than two hours. But if one fairy tale wouldn’t be enough, why not adapt many? A year earlier, the two collaborators had come up with an idea for an ambitious crossover TV special: a bunch of characters from situational comedies would end up in a car accident, investigated by characters from cop shows, and treated in a hospital by characters from medical dramas. Lapine realized they could apply the concept to their musical. A bunch of characters from different fairy tales would go on a quest, with their lives and problems intertwining with each other.

And where would all of these fairy tale characters naturally journey together? Why, into the woods, of course! The woods has a certain duality to it in fairy tales; it’s a place of darkness and mystery, but also of reflection and knowledge. Characters face great peril and tribulations in the woods but emerge having gained wisdom and a greater sense of purpose. A setting like this could easily sustain a new original fairy tale. And yet, there was one more thing that bothered the writers: every fairy tale ends with characters solving their own problems and living happily ever after. Lapine found that every “happily ever after” came from little acts of dishonesty in their stories. Characters decided they had solved their problems and moved on with loose ends still left untied. In reality, these lies could
have dire consequences, which would prevent a long-term happy ending. Jack may decide to live happily ever after killing a giant, but that doesn’t mean there are no more giants left. In order to eschew the false expectations of classic tales, Sondheim and Lapine decided to write one that would deal with life after happily ever after.

The creators still felt the need to provide a gateway into the world of this show for people to connect to. While audiences may recognize the characters of Rapunzel and Cinderella, they likely wouldn’t relate to them. Few people have been locked in a tower for most of their lives or suddenly found themselves turned into royalty after attending a ball. To remedy this, Sondheim and Lapine created a Baker and his Wife that live in a fairy tale world but “are at heart a contemporary urban American couple,” as Sondheim writes in his book Look, I Made a Hat. The other fairy tale characters may have royal pains or magical mishaps, but the Baker and his Wife simply want to start a family. Sondheim and Lapine used these two central characters as a starting point, and from there, they introduced all of the other fairy tale characters and their issues at hand. The first act is more of a traditional retelling of various fairy tales. Then in act two, the characters realize their desires had unintended consequences and understand that they all must work together to try to set things right. Still, the show had to have heart. Sondheim remarked that he found himself writing his most compassionate songs “to express the straightforward, unembarrassed goodness of James’s characters.”
Into the Woods first debuted at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego, California in 1986. During an early performance there, a women’s theater club started to leave after the first half, recognizing that the fairy tales had all reached their traditional conclusions. Luckily, they were notified just in time and, as Sondheim recalls, “returned and enjoyed the second act even more.” The team made sure to clarify that the show had two acts, and that while fairy tales may cut off after the characters are content, their lives don’t end there. The musical opened on Broadway in 1987. Directed by Lapine and starring Bernadette Peters, Joanna Gleason and Chip Zien, it won three Tony Awards. At one point during development of the musical, Stephen Sondheim predicted that, “if the piece worked, it would spawn innumerable productions for many years to come, since it dealt with world myths and fables.” Every year since its Broadway debut, several theater companies perform a version of the show, and like the many iterations and variations of the folk tales themselves, productions vary in tone, theme and subject. Because folktales are universal and withstand the test of time, the musical feels as timely and relevant as ever. Here at Writers Theatre, we welcome you into a world that is unique to us and our community. This is your Into the Woods.
LEAN FORWARD AND ENGAGE!

Join us for these exciting events, tailored to enhance your WT experience! For more information and to RSVP visit writerstheatre.org/events.

FROM PAGE TO STAGE
Writers Theatre and select North Shore libraries and community partners are proud to present this series of special events, lectures and workshops designed to enhance your appreciation of the art. From Page to Stage is generously sponsored by Randy L. and Melvin R. Berlin. For an up-to-date list of new events, visit writerstheatre.org/fpts.

POST-SHOW CONVERSATION: THE WORD
Join us after every Tuesday evening performance (excluding First Week and any extension weeks) of every production in our 2019/20 Season for a 15-minute discussion of the play facilitated by a member of the WT Artistic Team.

POST-SHOW CONVERSATION: THE ARTIST
Join us after every Wednesday evening performance (excluding First Week and any extension weeks) of every production in our 2019/20 Season for a 15-minute discussion with actors from the production facilitated by a member of the WT Artistic Team.

PRE-SHOW CONVERSATION: UP CLOSE
Join us at 6:45pm in the Atrium before every Thursday evening performance (excluding First Week and any extension weeks) for a 15-minute primer on the context and content of the play, facilitated by a member of the WT Artistic Team.

SOCIAL HOUR AT WT
Remember that the WT Bar is open for an hour before and after our performances! You are welcome to enjoy a snack or beverage and discuss the play in the Litowitz Atrium, on our Grand Gallery Walk or on the Stephanie and Bill Sick Rooftop Terrace.
A DOLL’S HOUSE

WRITTEN BY HENRIK IBSEN
ADAPTED BY SANDRA DELGADO AND MICHAEL HALBERSTAM
DIRECTED BY LAVINA JADHWANI

September 25–December 15, 2019
Performed in the Gillian Theatre

This celebrated drama by the playwright of WT's smash hit Hedda Gabler receives a sleek, streamlined interpretation that is unpredictable, fresh and captivating.
At its core, Henrik Ibsen’s A Doll’s House is a thriller of intrigue, love and family drama.

Years ago, Nora Helmer took private action to protect her husband. Now, with the arrival of new jobs and old friends, her secrets are starting to unravel, putting the future of the entire Helmer family in jeopardy. Will Nora be able to stop the truth from coming out, or will her own love destroy those she holds most dear? A Doll’s House follows Nora as she fights to reconcile her secret past with the demands of the present, all while under the watchful eye of a society that views her as little more than a puppet.

Originally written as a three-act, three-hour play, adaptors Sandra Delgado and Michael Halberstam have focused Ibsen’s compelling core narrative into a tight, ninety-minute one-act version. By homing in on the action, the suspense and heartbreak of Nora’s struggle rises to the surface, quickly driving the plot towards an inevitable and unforgettable finale. While keeping the story set in 19th century Oslo, Delgado and Halberstam, in conversation with director Lavina Jadhwani, are intentionally sharpening the play’s dialogue and design in ways that blur the lines between then and now. Ibsen was writing this story at a time when the movement for women’s rights in Europe was strengthening. With #MeToo defining our current moment, this new take on A Doll’s House retains its power to captivate and provoke.

A top-notch cast has been assembled to bring this iconic story to life. Making her Writers Theatre debut as Nora will be Cher Álvarez, who has appeared on stage at Goodman, Steppenwolf and Drury Lane. As Nora’s husband Torvald, Gabriel Ruiz returns to WT for the fourth time, having appeared most recently as Dr. Fine & Dr. Madden in Next to Normal. Also returning from last season will be Tiffany Renee Johnson (Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom), playing Nora’s recently resurfaced childhood friend, Christine. As Helmer family friend, Dr. Rank, Gregory Matthew Anderson returns again to the WT stage, having last appeared in Arcadia and Death of a Streetcar Named Virginia Woolf: A Parody. Also making their WT debuts will be accomplished actors Adam Poss as the mysterious Krogstad and Amy Carle as the Helmer family maid, Anne-Marie.

Following in the footsteps of the smash-hit Writers Theatre production of Hedda Gabler, this is A Doll’s House as you’ve never seen it before!
WT Education celebrates 10 years of premiere residency program THE NOVEL SERIES

The scene: a classroom on the third floor of Joseph Jungman School, a Chicago Public School located in the city’s Pilsen neighborhood. Twenty-five seventh-grade students sit on either side of the room as an audience of their peers, parents and other school staff members slowly file in, the air filled with their nervous, excited chatter, sneakers squeaking across the hardwood floors and the distinct ruffling of scripts as last-minute blocking reviews and line edits are made. Once the audience is in place, a hush falls over the room. One student rises and takes “center stage” – in this instance, a large, empty space at the back of the classroom where all of the desks have dutifully been pushed aside. The student speaks one word – his name, “Javier.” Other students join him, one by one, sharing their own names, each placing a hand onto the shoulder of the
student next to them. After every student has taken a moment to introduce themselves – to claim their space – the story begins.

This is just one example of a final presentation for THE NOVEL SERIES, WT Education’s flagship in-school residency program. First piloted in the 2008-2009 school year, THE NOVEL SERIES is a theatre and literary arts curriculum designed to allow students to explore literature and the artistry of bringing text to life. Students engage in a layered investigation of text and enter a rigorous artistic process that includes deep academic enrichment and meaningful text-to-self and text-to-world connections. At Jungman School, students read The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros, a beloved coming-of-age story about a young Chicano girl shaping her identity and navigating her relationship with her family, friends and neighborhood – then wrote and performed their own vignettes in the style of the novel, sharing intimate looks into their lives, struggles and aspirations in their own words.

These text-to-self and text-to-world connections are key to the success of THE NOVEL SERIES, which centers student-generated work and empowers young people to share their stories. It also emphasizes social-emotional learning through collaboration – as one student put it, “during this unit I learned how to work with others even through difficulties and next time I hope I use this skill in the future to improve my bond with my peers and persevere.”

THE NOVEL SERIES was developed by Writers Theatre in collaboration with teachers and administrators in Chicago schools. It takes the best practices of literature programs like Writers Workshop, Guided Reading, and Literature Circles and blends them into a student-driven, arts-integrated program. The program fosters a love of reading, appreciation of how themes and events in literature relate to real life and stretches students’ creative potential.

In the 2018-2019 school year, THE NOVEL SERIES reached 874 students in 35 classrooms across 10 Chicago Public Schools, from South Shore to Rogers Park. Looking ahead to next school year, WT Education is thrilled to continue working with students all over the Chicagoland area as they “[learn] to take risks, work together, and know that every voice counts.”
ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

Writers Theatre is committed to making our Theatre accessible for everyone. We are proud to offer Access Subscriptions and the following services:

For People with Mobility Difficulties
  • Accessible parking spaces along Tudor Court
  • Drop-off lane by the building’s main entrance
  • Accessible entrances to the building
  • Doorbell at the main entrance to request assistance with the front doors
  • Courtesy wheelchair to assist with entering the building and theatre spaces
  • Wheelchair-accessible seating*
  • Elevator Access to second-level seating, Grand Gallery Walk and Stephanie and Bill Sick Rooftop Terrace and Garden

*Depending on your preference, you may transfer into a theatre seat or request to have the theatre seat removed to remain in the wheelchair. When purchasing your tickets, please let the Box Office know if you would like the theatre seat removed.

For People Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
We are pleased to offer assistive listening devices in each of our performance spaces. Contact the Box Office with questions or for advance reservations. Assistive listening devices are offered free of charge.

In all of the performance spaces in our new theatre center, we have t-coil induction loop technology. For anyone with a telecoil built into their hearing aid or cochlear implant, by switching it on you will be able to hear our performances with additional amplification and clarity. Check with your audiologist for specific instructions on how to operate your personal telecoil-equipped device.
We are happy to connect you with scripts for our shows to read prior to your attendance. For details, review our Script Policy at writerstheatre.org/script-policy or contact the Box Office.

**For People Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision**

Large print programs are available at every performance at the Box Office.

Braille programs are available by prior request through the Box Office. Contact the Box Office at least two weeks prior to your scheduled performance with this request.

We can accommodate seating needs for guests with service animals. Contact the Box Office to request this accommodation.

Open-Captioned performance: **Saturday, September 14 at 3pm**

For additional information on accessibility services and subscriptions, contact access@writerstheatre.org or 847-242-6005.

The Accessibility Fund is a gift of Doris Conant and the Conant Family Foundation.

Box Office: **847-242-6000**
WT BAR

WINE

RED
Alpamanta Malbec ................................................................. $9
Van Duzer Pinot Noir ............................................................ $9
La Garrigue du Midi Cabernet Sauvignon ............................... $10

ROSÉ
Ostatu Rosado ........................................................................ $9

WHITE
Santome Chardonnay ............................................................. $9
Firelands Pinot Grigio ............................................................ $9
Yorkville Cellars Sauvignon Blanc ......................................... $10

SPARKLING
Charles de Fère Cuvée Jean Louis Blanc de Blancs ............... $12
Sgajo Prosecco ..................................................................... $9, by the glass/$36, by the bottle

Our beer and wine products are subject to change, please ask your bartender for an up to date listing of our current selection.
BEER & CIDER

**Solemn Oath** Snaggletooth Bandanda ........................................ $6
**Original Sin** McIntosh Unfiltered .............................................. $6
**Two Brothers** Domaine DuPage .................................................. $6
**Off Color Brewing** Apex Predator .............................................. $7
**Great Lakes Brewing** Edmund Fitzgerald ................................. $7

LIQUOR

A selection of **Koval** and other premium liquors

DESSERTS

Assorted cookies ............................................................................ $4
Assorted bars ................................................................................ $5
**Ethereal Confections chocolate bar** ......................................... $7

ADDITIONAL CONCESSIONS

Coffee (Regular, Decaf) ................................................................. $3
Rishi Hot Tea (Chamomile, Earl Grey, Peppermint) ...................... $2
Soda (Coke, Diet Coke, Sprite, Ginger Ale) ................................. $2
Water ............................................................................................ $2
CUSTOM COCKTAILS

Enjoy a custom cocktail from the WT Bar—specially created for each of our productions by Mixed metaPours!

LIFT THE SPELL

WHITE RUM, COCONUT MILK, TWISTED ALCHEMY PINEAPPLE JUICE, MATHILDE CRÈME DE CASSIS AND GOLDSHLAGGER CINNAMON LIQUEUR

All of our signature cocktail creations are designed by WT Cocktail Consultant Cheryl Rich Heisler & Mixed metaPours.

312-613-7499 | www.mixedmetapours.com
STAY IN TOUCH WITH WRITERS THEATRE
JOIN THE CONVERSATION!
#IntotheWoodsWT

Share your thoughts on the show!

Take this survey about Into the Woods: bit.ly/WTWoods
Write a review of your experience on Yelp: bit.ly/WTonYelp

Find us on Facebook: facebook.com/writers-theatre
Follow us on Twitter: @WritersTheatre
Follow us on Instagram: @writers_theatre

Check in to Writers Theatre on Swarm

Sign up for our email list to receive news updates, backstage stories, photos, videos and more: writerstheatre.org/email

Follow our company on LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/writers-theatre

We look forward to hearing from you!
## INTO THE WOODS

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- **Private Event**
- **D** Post-Show Conversation
- **U** Pre-Show Conversation