

REVIEW

'Into the Woods, Jr.' is sure to please audiences of all ages

By **Ted Larsen**
Correspondent

Youth theater usually is viewed through the "for" lens — as in "this show is entertaining, *for a kid's show*" or "that singer was strong, *for a young voice*." Not so in Broadview Height's Spotlights Community Theatre's entertaining production of "Into The Woods, Jr." There is no "for" about it. It's just an excellent and thoroughly enjoyable production on its own.

A youth adaptation of Stephen Sondheim's original "grown up" musical, "Into The Woods, Jr." explores several well-known fairy tales in unique ways. In this magical world, all the stories overlap and coalesce, pulled together by a new tale about a baker and his wife.

The appellation "Jr." often implies "dumbed down," but not so here. Sondheim is hard, yet this show uses the same



Nicole Velotta appears as Cinderella in "Into the Woods Jr."

challenging music as the original, and the music is ubiquitous. This remarkably talented cast, without exception, is more than up to the challenge, both as singers and actors.

Nicole Velotta as Cinderella is a wonderful actress with a gorgeous voice. **Emily Johnson** as Little Red Riding Hood is engaging, with superb stage

presence. **Krista Shorf** as the baker's wife is funny and polished and has a terrific voice. As the baker, **Jordan Cree** is equally funny and commands the stage during every scene.

Of special note is **Mary Clare Meyer** as the witch. Acting behind a scary witch's mask that virtually obscures her face, she superbly creates a character through voice and body language.

The rest of this strong cast is filled out by **Maggie Majercik**, **Tyler Clegg**, **Sarah Laferty**, **Mark Gulick**, **Nicole Tomak**, **Maddie Pierce**, **Nicole Pellachia**, **George Costanzo**, **Brittany Paige**, **Peter Landoll**, **Eli Shively**, **Lindsay Tryon**, and **Katie Landoll**.

Tim Anderson's direction is assured and clever. He has the actors confident and in control. This is a tiny stage, and moving this large cast through the imaginative set is challenging. Anderson has utilized the space with alacrity.

This is youth theater, but you don't need to be a kid, or a relative of a kid, to enjoy this rich, textured work. It's immensely entertaining and a tour de force for Spotlights.

"Into The Woods, Jr." continues through July 26 at 9543 Broadview Road. For tickets or information, log onto www.broadview-heights-spotlights.org or call (440) 526-4404.