Stephen Sondheim has moved from straightforward storytelling, as in *West Side Story* and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, to experiments in not only musical composition, but in dramatic form.

He has not been alone, of course. James Lapine has been a lifelong collaborator, though Lapine’s contribution is often overshadowed by Sondheim’s renown. *Into the Woods* is one of Stephen Sondheim’s explorations of a unique two-part dramatic structure.

Act one presents the world of fairy tales—stories with which we were raised and which we teach our children. Each fairy tale, of course, is a parable for commonly held beliefs of right and wrong and of “the way life is.” Cinderella is rescued from hardship by a man who will provide for her; Jack becomes rich without sacrifice; Little Red Riding Hood believes mother’s code of conduct will keep her from harm’s way; by following the rules the Baker will get his reward; and the Witch believes she can indefinitely protect Rapunzel from the evils of the world.

In our production we set off the first act’s fantasy by exposing the theatrical chicanery involved in staging a play—much as Bertold Brecht suggested in his theatrical theory. Throughout the play actors will step out of character to give the authors’ point overt emphasis. We will hear the stage manager’s voice and see the stage hands. The theatrical illusion will be disrupted, drawing attention to the fact that we are seeing the presentation of a collection of ideas through words and actions.

In act two, when the familiar story lines end, the characters are confronted with the unchartered realities of life—without the comfort of the storyteller providing the next path to take.

Now the characters must make decisions for themselves—they make mistakes, face moral dilemmas, and must make choices—with inevitable mixed consequences.

The simplified fantasy views of life we were raised with are juxtaposed to the incongruities of the reality we live in.

But Sondheim and Lapine go further than stating the obvious conditions and contradictions of life. They offer some observations on coping and finding peace within chaos—by discovering what is right and good for ourselves, by honoring others’ mistakes, realizing we are not alone, exorcising the self-deluding spells we cast, and being careful what we teach and what we wish.

The importance of protecting these articles of adult faith is the final note of the play: careful before you say "listen to me," for though children may not obey, they will listen, see, and grow up to be just like us.