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REVIEW

'Into the Woods' serves up spectacle, charm, pizzazz

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Maeyson Menzel (front) and Naomi Blansit in "Into the Woods."
COURTESY CHARLES BENOIT

Posted Thursday, February 20, 2020 3:10 pm

Tom Helma

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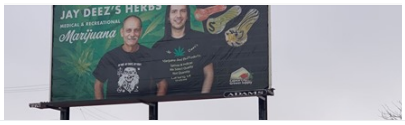
on Wednesday
At least two billboards for Jay Deez's Herbs popped up in Lansing within the last few weeks. One in the Stadium District shows a picture of its owner, John Dinaso, along with a tagline for "medical and recreational marijuana" and custom glass pipes.
One problem: No recreational shops have been fully licensed yet to operate in Lansing.



Once upon a time, in my imagination, two precocious 5-year-olds decided to rewrite their favorite childhood fairy tales, as a musical, no less. Upon reaching adulthood, Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine decided, "Oh, what the heck? Let's go for it." Enter "Into the Woods," now playing in the completely refurbished comforts of MSU's Fairchild Theatre.

The play takes great liberties with the original tales; fractured fragments remain, reassembled as a child might, into a new and more complicated story.

Scenic design director Brandon Barker's three hanging scrims have black and white projections of '30s-era Detroit skyscrapers splashed onto them. Dramaturge Laura MacDonald explains in program notes that Detroiters, starving to death in 1932, participated in the Ford Hunger strike on a bitter March day. They were met with police and firefighters wielding hoses, tear gas and guns. Four people died.

It might be a Nostradamus stretch to suggest that these now deconstructed tales draw a parallel to that time of great economic woe.

No matter – the actors can sing; the singers can act. The result is spectacular. In this mix-match of lead characters, several individuals stand out. Cinderella, portrayed by Jacqueline Lee, has a lyrical soprano voice that pierces tender hearts, while Naomi Blansit as the witch combines a strong singing voice with vocal drama and dramatic pizzazz.

At the heart of this story is the baker, played by Kevin Baker. He and his wife, played by Sarah Gramercy yearn for a child. Gramercy adds yet another powerful vocal performance, while Baker makes up for a lesser musical performance, stepping to the edge of the stage with a husky deeply emotional speaking/singing performance of "No More."

Maeyson Menzel is Little Red Riding Hood and sings a beautiful duet "No One is Alone" with Cinderella as the play comes to an end. Everyone is at the top of their game, not a weak performance by any.

Barker's scenic design includes a backdrop with the big guy of Beanstalk fame, in which the whole stage shudders as we see a giant foot tumble over, on screen, behind the actors. Director Deric McNish has pulled it all together in this production, and it almost makes sense — especially if we can just suspend our hyper-adult critical voices and just sit back and enjoy the charm of it.

"Into the Woods"

Through Feb. 23

Fairchild Theatre

542 Auditorium Road, East Lansing

theatre.msu.edu/woods (http://www.theatre.msu.edu/woods)

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Calendar of events

FEB 29 **Flint Firebirds vs. Kingston Frontenacs**
Dort Federal Event... | Flint, MI

FRI 21 **Sorry, I'm Not Leaving | A solo exhibition by ...**
Lansing Art Galler... | Lansing, MI

FRI 21 **Warm Winter Readers**
Grand Ledge Area D... | Grand Ledge, MI

FRI 21 **Into the Woods**
Fairchild Theatre | East Lansing, MI

FRI 21 **TGIF Dance Party - all welcome!**
Hawk Hollow | Bath, MI

FRI 21 SAT 22 SUN 23 MON 24 TUE 25 WED 26

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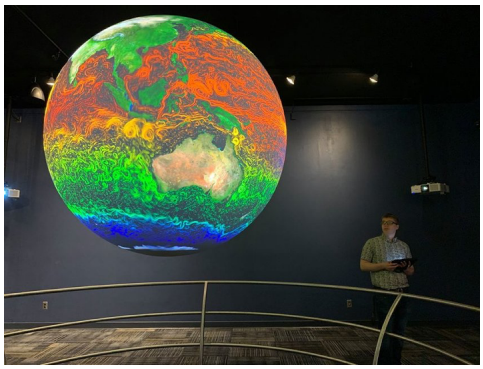

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Science on a Sphere demonstrates effects of climate change at MSU (/stories/science-on-a-sphere-demonstrates-effects-of-climate-change-at-msu,13882)

SOS is used in over 130 locations around the world as an educational tool and research display system. MSU hopes that students and faculty can use the technology to present their own findings.

(/stories/turn-it-down-krissy-booth-brings-michigan-made-pop-majesty-to-culture-clash,13881)

Turn it Down: Krissy Booth brings Michigan-made pop majesty to Culture Clash (/stories/turn-it-down-krissy-booth-brings-michigan-made-pop-majesty-to-culture-clash,13881)

Krissy Booth, known for her sleek-pop prowess, returns Friday to The Avenue Café to perform at Culture Clash, a monthly event highlighting diverse genres and artforms.

(/stories/poetry-back-on-the-rise-in-greater-lansing,13880)

Poetry back on the rise in Greater Lansing (/stories/poetry-back-on-the-rise-in-greater-lansing,13880)

It's a rare weekend when there isn't some type of poetry event in Greater Lansing.

Read more ▸ (/arts-and-culture/)

FOOD

(/stories/uncorked-combating-gatekeeping-in-the-wine-industry,13835)

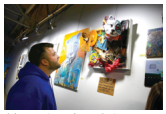
Uncorked: Combating gatekeeping in the wine industry (/stories/uncorked-combating-gatekeeping-in-the-wine-industry,13835)

A stunning California cabernet franc had me thinking about a complicated food and beverage issue for a few days.

(/stories/new-in-town-nutritious-shake-shop-opens-location-downtown,13825)

New in Town: Nutritious shake shop opens location downtown (/stories/new-in-town-nutritious-shake-shop-opens-location-downtown,13825)

Soul Nutrition is a new spot downtown that wants its smorgasbord of gluten-free smoothies to become an addition to your post-workout routine.



(/stories/multivenue-festival-lights-up-reo-town-with-booze-and-art,13801)

Multivenue festival lights up REO Town with booze and art (/stories/multivenue-festival-lights-up-reo-town-with-booze-and-art,13801)

Who said festivals were only for the warmer seasons? The eighth annual Art and Craft Beer Fest — a festival that has art, live music, comedy, short films, beer and more — will go down Saturday in REO Town.

Read more ▸ (/food/)

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MEET THE STAFF

SKYLER ASHLEY
Arts and Culture Editor

Journalism has been my full-time occupation and passion for several years. I've found reporting in Lansing to come naturally since I grew up in the area and never found a reason to leave. Outside of my work, I can mainly be found playing guitar and wasting my money on sushi.

(/calendar/)

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