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Shakespeare and Shylock

Shakespeare, racism, and censorship are explored as San Diego Repertory Theatre gives us The Merchant of Venice and the solo play Shylock

BY CHARLENE BALDRIDGE

Contrary to what contemporary producers and directors would have us believe, William Shakespeare was not (as John Gross writes in Shylock: A Legend and Its Legacy) a hidden 20th-century liberal.

That is why mounting a production of The Merchant of Venice and even The Taming of the Shrew is so problematic that many present-day theaters, particularly in the USA and Canada, eschew their production.

Shylock the Jew in The Merchant of Venice (1596–97) is one of Shakespeare's most controversial characters, subject to myriad interpretations, much controversy, protest and, hopefully, the kind of reasoned argument and debate that leads to better understanding.

Because the Jews had been ousted from England in 1290, it seems unlikely that Shakespeare was personally acquainted with a Jew, although recent scholarship shows there was a population of around 100 secret Jews in England during Shakespeare's time.

Shakespeare used Giovanni Fiorentino's Il Pecorone as his major source and Christopher Marlowe's The Jew of Malta as his impetus. Though we can't know how Shylock was performed, the character was informed by a stock villain well known to Elizabethan society in which suspicion and fear of the "other" gave rise to lurid folktales featuring a Jewish bogeyman who stole, circumcised, and crucified Christian babies for ritual use.

Jews were either grotesquely comic in red wigs and artificial noses, or horrifying as bloodthirsty schemers, like Marlowe's Barabas.

Was Shakespeare anti-Semitic?

"The controversy," said N.Y. Shakespeare Festival Artistic Director Joseph Papp, "usually centers around the way Shylock the Jew is portrayed and treated." Papp believed anti-Semitism exists in the play but Shakespeare himself was not anti-Semitic. He believed that Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes" speech is "one of the most eloquent pleas to our sense of common humanity ever uttered on the stage."

Those who interpret Shylock as villain point to the last two lines of the speech ("And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?") as evidence to the contrary.

Whether Shylock is perceived as villain or as wronged Jew, Shakespeare imbued him with humanity and motivation and plopped him down in the midst of a romantic comedy that he tends to overwhelm.

Many regard as anti-climactic what follows the courtroom scene, in which Shylock sues for his right to a pound of the merchant Antonio's flesh. Portia's "quality of mercy" speech and Shylock's forced conversion to Christianity make this one of the most extraordinary scenes in English literature.

Shakespeare's works have endured more than 400 years, made relevant by each succeeding generation, which re-invents the author and re-interprets his characters to suit times, tastes, and moods.

In Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human, Harold Bloom writes: "[Shakespeare] extensively informs the language we speak, his principal characters have become our mythology, and he,

Continued on page 47
The Noise of Time: the Emerson String Quartet's acclaimed exploration of the life of Dmitri Shostakovich, comes to UCLA

BY CHARLES ISHERWOOD

wanted to suggest that there was another way of listening to the music,” says Simon McBurney, explaining the impulse behind The Noise of Time, the theater piece inspired by the life of Dmitri Shostakovich that he created in conjunction with the Emerson String Quartet.

The resulting work, an intriguing combination of theater and concert, was warmly received when it was first staged as part of Lincoln Center’s month-long tribute to the composer in early 2000. Anthony Tommasini, in the New York Times, suggested that the creators had achieved McBurney’s goal: writing that Noise of Time “shatters the normal protocols of concertgoing and compels the audience to experience this disconcerting music without intellectual defenses for promotion.”

Although based in London, McBurney and his troupe, Théâtre de Complicité, are well known around the world. Complicité’s stunning, Street of Crocodiles, presented in New York in 1998, was a piercingly melancholy evocation of the writings of Polish novelist Bruno Schulz. McBurney recently played the central character in Complicité’s Ammonite, which explored memory on personal and even archaeological levels.

The idea of devising a work of theater around one of Shostakovich’s string quartets first came from Emerson violist Philip Setzer. The Quartet had been deeply immersed in Shostakovich’s music for some time, culminating in the performance, just before The Noise of Time’s debut, of all 15 of the quartets. That fact coincided with the release of a Grammy Award–winning boxed set of Shostakovich recordings on the Deutsche Grammophons label.

“Philip had the idea that something must be done onstage about Shostakovich, because his music is so dramatic and his life is full of so many enigmas,” explains Emerson violist Eugene Drucker. The string quartets, in particular, are intensely personal explorations of his inner life. The collaborators briefly considered the Eighth Quartet, one of Shostakovich’s most overtly autobiographical pieces of music, in which the composer encoded his own initiatives in the music’s structure.

“But there’s a level of biographical niceties in the Eighth that is absent from the Fifteenth,” continues Drucker. “The Fifteenth is tragic, but not in a way that advertises its own tragedy; it is more resigned than perhaps any other piece of Shostakovich that I can think of.

The Fifteenth is, unusually, composed of six adagio movements. It’s an unmitigated somber piece of music that does not at first strike the listener as offering a welcome to theatrical amplification. Tragedy lends itself naturally to theater, certainly, but resignation?

In fact, The Noise of Time does not seek to illustrate the music with theatrical metaphor at all – most of the theatrical apparatus of the production subsides when the Emerson takes the stage in the work’s second half to perform the quartet. McBurney’s goal was simply to create a frame for the music, a “listening atmosphere,” as McBurney describes it. “To say of doctors his respect for this great piece of music.”

The frame McBurney and his Théâtre de Complicité troupe constructed seeks to put the music in the context of both the composer’s life and the historical events that shaped it. Through a complex visual and aural landscape, the company creates a fragmented, shadow-haunted atmosphere, suitable for a man whose every word was marked by mysteries that continue to provide much fodder for critical and historical debate even today, more than a quarter century after his death in 1975.

“This was a man whose life was hidden in paradox and contradiction,” McBurney says. “His personal tragedy and the larger political context are inseparable, just as the absurd in his music is inseparable from the most meaningful.”

The central question surrounding Shostakovich is the question of his loyalties. He lived and worked under the iron thumb of Stalinism, composing symphonies to order when the Party demanded it. But the ambivalences and ambiguities of his music disturbed the hidebound ears of Party ideologues and even Stalin himself, perhaps most famously with the opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk. Was Shostakovich a committed believer in the Communist program or a secret resistor? Music historians have offered evidence to support both views, with most agreeing that he was a deeply conflicted, continuously self-transforming man whose contradictions are embedded in the fabric of his most personal music, particularly the quartets.

For this reason, the particular of his life bear more directly on his music than may be the case with most composers. The Noise of Time seeks to illuminate this relationship in a theatrical context, to reveal the echoes of history both personal and political that resonate in his music. “What we listen to in his music is the sound of the age,” says McBurney. “In his music, we find one of the most human realizations of what it meant to be an artist in the 20th century.”

Charles Isherwood is the chief theater critic for Variety. This article first appeared in Stagebill, © 2001.
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Q&A with David Rambo
BY ANDY BUCK

David Rambo had two brushes with fame before writing a hit play. He wrote a hit song about Elizabeth Taylor, which was featured in the 1993 Off Broadway extravaganza, Howard Crumbo's "Whoopee-Dee-Doo!" And his domestic partner of 27 years, Theodore Hoyt, was the original Old Spice boy on TV. "He who the sailor threw the bottle of Old Spice to at the end of the commercial," says Rambo proudly.

But today, Rambo, a former real estate salesman, is known as the author of God's Man in Texas, which opens this month at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles. A critical hit at the 1999 Humana Festival in Louisville, God's Man has become one of the most successful plays in the country this year.

ANDY BUCK: You've described yourself as being "not particularly religious." What inspired you to write God's Man in Texas?

DAVID RAMBO: I initially wanted to write a play that would come down very hard on big religion. My thesis was that big religion is inherently corrupting. But it's not just religion. Big anything — whether it's an artist in the commercial world or a man in God in the industry of religion — the connection gets lost.

AB: With that thesis in mind, one of your preacher characters could have turned out to be the stereotypical bad guy. But critics have praised you for avoiding that trap.

DR: I'm much more interested in the struggle of good versus good than good versus evil. The failings of men and women are so interesting to me when they're doing what they really think is the right thing. If I write good versus evil, when the audience walks in they already know where it's going. There's no journey for them. It becomes television.

AB: Some of the evangelists we hear about in God's Man in Texas — fictional or not — started out as salesmen. Do you, as a former salesman, ever fantasize about being a preacher?

DR: Never. The only part of organized religion that I ever heard was the music. I've always loved the hymns. I never wanted to preach. But when I started researching preachers for this play I was struck by how many of them use sales techniques. Billy Graham was a Fuller Brads salesman. And for many years, First Baptist Dallas, the First Protestant mega-church, had a course taught by Zig Ziglar, the greatest sales trainer in the country.

AB: For someone who's never lived in Texas, you seem to have a very interesting connection with that state.

DR: Well, I have family in Houston, which is partly why I set the play there. I hated Texas when I first went down there about 25 years ago. I grew up on the East Coast. We always thought of Texas as LBJ holding his dog up by the ears. We had no sense of the breadth and richness of the place. And I love Houston. When you're in Houston you're not anywhere else. If you're in Dallas, it could just as well be Phoenix or Albuquerque. But Houston has its own character — sometimes very refined, sometimes really coarse, kind of freewheeling — and bigger. Big is not a bad thing in Houston. It's not even a good thing. Big just is.

Andy Buck is an associate editor at Stagebill.

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BRAVO AWARDS CELEBRATE 20TH ANNIVERSARY

This month marks a milestone in the history of the Music Center Bravo Awards. On February 25 the program, which honors outstanding teachers and schools for their commitment to arts education, will celebrate its 20th anniversary.

Established in 1982 by the Music Center Education Division, the Bravo Awards recognize educators who provide their students access to high quality arts education as part of the core school program. Over the years, the Bravo Awards have become one of the nation’s most prestigious arts education awards — and the only awards in California which honor teachers and schools in all of the arts disciplines.

“We have always believed that the arts are crucial to the development of every child,” says Mark Slavkin, vice president for education at the Music Center. “Dance, music, theatre, and visual arts require critical thinking skills and encourage the creative process.” Teachers who incorporate the arts into their classroom activities, not only contribute to their students’ academic achievement, but also to their quality of life.”

Three Bravo Awards are presented each year: one to a school, one to a teacher working in an arts field and one to a general classroom teacher. The selection process begins when schools and teachers — both public and private throughout Southern California — are nominated by principals, faculty committees, superintendents or parents. A committee made up of educators and artists review every application and select ten finalists. These finalists are featured in videos at the Awards gala dinner. The finalists and winners are announced at the dinner ceremony, regularly hosted by producer/director Garry Marshall.

This year 57 teachers and eleven schools have been nominated for the Bravo Award. “These nominees are the true heroes,” says Slavkin. “They inspire the creativity, curiosity and imagination of their students. I congratulate each and every one of them and commend their dedication and commitment to arts education.”

Since 1995 the Bravo Awards have been sponsored by Club 100, a support organization of the Music Center. The group raises funds for the Bravo Awards at the bi-annual Distinguished Artist Awards gala dinner. In addition to raising funds for the Bravo Awards ceremony, some members sponsor cash awards for winners: Roberta Haft and Mary Levin Cutler sponsor the $2,000 Arts Specialist Award and Elinor Turner sponsors the $2,000 Generalist Award, in honor of her mother Sue Weisman. Robinsons-May also generously donates $5,000 to the winning school. Lynda Jenner, director of special programs for the Music Center Education Division, produces the Bravo Awards.
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ELTON JOHN & TIM RICE'S
AIDA
Book by Linda Woolverton
and Robert Falls & David Henry Hwang
Directed by Robert Falls
NOVEMBER 11, 2001 – JANUARY 5, 2002
Previews begin November 7

into
the
woods
Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim
Book and Direction by James Lapine
FEBRUARY 18 – MARCH 24, 2002
Previews begin February 1

THE FULL MONTY
Book by Terrence McNally
Music and Lyrics by David Yazbek
Directed by Jack O'Brien
APRIL 24 – JUNE 8, 2002
Previews begin April 6

THE ALLERGIEST'S WIFE
By Charles Busch
Directed by Lynne Meadow
JUNE 26 – AUGUST 11, 2002
Previews begin June 18

Bonus Option at the Wilshire Theatre

CENTER THEATRE GROUP
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I T S A V E R Y G R E A T P L E A S U R E T O W E L C O M E Y O U to the premiere of the new production of Into the Woods, Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine’s legendary musical exploration of the power and mystery of the fairy tale. It is the first major musical of this internationally acclaimed Tony Award-winning musical. This production is not a re-creation of the original hit. Nor is it a radical re-imagining of the story as we now see it. Instead, a few years ago or more recently with Flower Drum Song at The Mark Taper Forum, rather than Into the Woods this represents a new (and I think the right) instance of great theatre artists having the opportunity to experiment, re-explore and re-envision one of their forest creations. Every production of a truly rich theatre work is, in some sense, only partially realized; in making specific choices, in bringing one incarnation of a work fully to life, one necessarily precludes other choices. And in the challenge and pressure of opening a new show, especially in the intense world of Broadway, there just isn’t time to explore or develop every possible the piece has to offer. Also, the passage of time can enhance the creator’s perspective of the work.

Considering that Into the Woods is in some ways about the complete life of the unconscious, it is not surprising that returning to the musical after some thirteen years James and Stephen have discovered new things in their work—themes, resonances, and meanings hidden in the dense forest of their creation. James in particular has made some fascinating changes in the design and staging—a new song for the Witch and Rapunzel, a more active Narrator, and The Wolves instead of one, for instance. And while I don’t want to give too much away, I will say that those of you who were fortunate enough to see the original production when it was here in 1987 will find this new version a fresh experience. If you are seeing Into the Woods for the first time, you will have the privilege of experiencing the American musical at its most subtle and sophisticated.

Stephen Sondheim has been in the vanguard of musical theatre for five decades. His popularity and achievements continue to grow and deepen. For example, The Kennedy Center is preparing a repertoire of six, fully-staged Sondheim musicals this spring and summer. And, as we read this, Barbara Cook’s one-woman show Much More Sondheim, which received brilliant reviews, will have concluded at Lincoln Center. Furthermore, Sondheim’s songs are essential to the trajectory of the career of Elaine Stritch and are the quintessential elements in her acclaimed show Elaine Stritch: At Liberty, which is moving to Broadway. And Mandy Patinkin, whose recent concert appearance at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion included many Sondheim works, is preparing his own all-Sondheim evening. That our greatest song interpreters, themselves uncompromising artists, should seek such deep devotions and attachment to

Los Angeles impresario William Severson, who for six decades managed the Greek Theatre, the Philharmonic and then helped build the Music Center and run it as administrator and chief financial officer for 20 years, passed away on December 29, 2001, at the age of 88. Bill Severson was a great administrator and instrumental in bringing together private and government funding, largely unheard of in the arts at that time. But most of all, he was a very wise, experienced guide and able to do so in those exciting and challenging founding days of the Music Center and our inspiration as a resident company. He was a great and good personal friend for many years and will be deeply, deeply missed. Ave atque vale! — Gordon

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CAST

IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Narrator .................................. JOHN McMArtIN
Cinderella .................................. LAURA BENANTI
Jack ........................................ ADAM WYLIE
Milky-White ................................ KATE REINDERS
Baker ....................................... STEPHEN DE ROSA
Baker's Wife ............................... KERRY O'MALLEY
Cinderella's Stepmother ................. PAMELA MYERS
Florinda .................................... TRACY NICOLE CHAPMAN
Lucinda ..................................... AMANDA NAUGHTON
Jack's Mother .............................. MARYLOUISE BURKE
Little Red Ridinghood ..................... MOLLY EPHRAIM
Witch ...................................... VANESSA WILLIAMS
Cinderella's Father ....................... DENNIS KELLY
Mysterious Man ............................ JOHN McMArtIN
Wolves ..................................... GREGG EDELMAN
CHRISTOPHER SIEBER
Rapunzel .................................... MELISSA DYE
Rapunzel's Prince ......................... CHRISTOPHER SIEBER
Granny ..................................... PAMELA MYERS
Cinderella's Prince ....................... GREGG EDELMAN
Steward .................................... TRENT ARMAND KENDALL
Horse ...................................... JENNIFER MALENKE

UNDERSTUDIES

The following actors are covering the roles indicated below.
Substitutions are never made unless there is an announcement at the time of the performance.

STEPHEN BERGER – Narrator/Mysterious Man/Baker/Cinderella's Father/Steward;
ADAM BRAZIER – Jack/Cinderella's Prince/Rapunzel's Prince/Wolf/Steward;
TRACY NICOLE CHAPMAN – Witch/MELISSA DYE – Cinderella/Little Red Ridinghood;
DENNIS KELLY – Narrator/Mysterious Man; TRENT ARMAND KENDALL – Bakers/Cinderella's Father;
CHAD KIMBALL – Jack/Rapunzel's Prince/Wolf/Milky-White/Horse;
JENNIFER MALENKE – Florinda/Lucinda/Rapunzel/Milky-White;
LINDA MUGLESTON – Witch/Baker/Wolf/Jack's Mother/Cinderella's Stepmother/Granny;
PAMELA MYERS – Jack's Mother; AMANDA NAUGHTON – Baker's Wife;
KATE REINDERS – Cinderella/Little Red Ridinghood/Rapunzel; CHRISTOPHER SIEBER – Cinderella's Prince.

TIME:
Once Upon A Time

PLACE:
A Far Off Kingdom

MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT I

Prologue: Into the Woods ................................ Company
Hello, Little Girl .................................... Wolves, Little Red Ridinghood
I Guess This Is Goodbye ......................... Jack
Maybe They're Magic .............................. Baker's Wife
Our Little World ................................... Witch, Rapunzel
I Know Things Now .............................. Little Red Ridinghood
A Very Nice Prince ............................... Cinderella, Baker's Wife
Giants in the Sky .................................. Jack
Agony ............................................. Cinderella's Prince, Rapunzel's Prince
It Takes Two ...................................... Baker, Baker's Wife
Stay With Me ..................................... Witch
On the Steps of the Palace ....................... Cinderella
Ever After ....................................... Narrator, Company

There will be one 15 minute intermission.
INTO THE FAIRY TALE:
The Forest of Eden by Frank Dwyer

OCHESTRA:

PERFORMING ARTS

PERFORMING ARTS

Now the poor child was all, all alone in the great forest, and so terrified that she stared at all the leaves on the trees and didn’t know what to do.

—Sue White and the Seven Owls, translated by Randall Jarrell in The Jumblies and Other Tales from the Brothers Grimm

AFTER STEPHEN SONDHEIM (COMPOSER & Lyricist) and James Lapine (playwright & director) won three Tonys and a Pulitzer Prize for Drama for Sunday in the Park With George, their first collaboration, they decided to go into the woods for their next project: to be specific, into the seductive and dangerous woods of the old fairy tales. The result, Into the Woods, is surely the most glorious work in the history of musical theatre. Before you begin to argue with that accolade (Cole Porter? Lerner and Loewe?), you should be aware that “glamor” is a fairy word. It refers to the power that fairies have to cast a spell over the senses, so that things are perceived as the enchanter wishes. Part of the considerable enchantment of Into the Woods, comes from the uncanny glamour of the tales themselves.

The brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, German scholars, published their first edition of folk tales, Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Children’s and Household Tales) in 1812. They collected the stories from a variety of sources. They did not invent them, although someone must have. No one knows how old they are or where they came from. It’s possible that, once upon a time (“when wishing still helped,” as one of the stories begins), some prehistororic Shakespeare invented all these characters around the fire: Cinderella, Hannel and Gretel, the Fisherman and his Wife, the Frog Prince, Rapunzel, Little Red Ridinghood, Tom Thumb, Rumpelstiltskin, and so many others that we have known all our lives. It is more likely that these old tales had many fathers and mothers. There are, of course, literary fairy tales, the creations of writers like Hans Christian Anderson, Carlo Collodi (Pinocchio), Washington Irving (Rip Van Winkle), Lewis Carroll (the Alice books), and Oscar Wilde — but many of the stories we know the best are truly “folk” tales. They were told by ordinary people — by laborers in fields or spinning-rooms, by families around the hearth. Their details may have changed, but their essences were preserved through succeeding generations until they were finally “told” to a collector who wrote them down.

As a result of this long process, many tales exist in multiple versions. The Grimms, for example, collected seven different “oral” versions of Ashenputtel, but they also knew the elegantly written version, Cinderella (1697), by the French poet Charles Perrault, who may have known the crueler, bawdier Italian version, La cenerentola (1634), by Giambattista Basile, who may have known an even earlier French version (1558) by Bonaventure des Périers. Even then, our heroine was no longer in her first youth. According to Steven Swan Jones (The Fairy Tale: The Magic Mirror of Imagination), more than five hundred versions of Cinderella’s story have been collected from oral tradition. She has lost her slipper in Europe, Africa, Australia, Java, Japan, China, and on the Indian subcontinent.

In this welter of sources, the real choice for Lapine and Sondheim was between the Grimms and Perrault, whose eight-story collection, popularly known as Contes de ma mère l’Oye (Mother Goose Tales), is more refined and softer, more suited to the rarefied Parisian drawing room than the German nursery. Most people know the Perrault versions because the Disney cartoons are based on them. Perrault is the man who gave Cinderella a Fairy Godmother and those alarming glass slippers. In the Grimms’ version, Ashenputtel goes to the ball three
times. The first time a little white bird on the tree above her mother’s grave has thrown down slippers of embroidered silk and silver for her to wear, she doesn’t understand. They aren’t mentioned, and the third time they are made of gold. She is one of her gold slippers on the third night because the sneaky Prince has seen the state slipper on her. She doesn’t want to make them. So Cinderella takes one of her gold slippers on the third night because the sneaky Prince has the state slipper on her cobble’s wax. Isn’t that how you remember it? Whatever effect those fashionable things, shoes had on the French Prince Charming, they didn’t tempt Lapine and Sondheim. They were in the Grimm tales because, as Lapine pointed out: “Grimm’s tales are darker.” Darker, indeed. In the short story, the stepstois “do their utmost” to fit their feet into the slipper. In the Grimm version, one of them actually cuts off her big toe. Then Red Ridinghood’s secret was to fit her grandmother, and buys Jack’s milk-white cow for five magic beans, stolen long ago from the Witch’s garden by the Baker’s father. (Material from other tales, especially Snow White and Rapunzel, fell by the side as the show developed.)

These characters all came through the woods to Broadway in 1987, where they won three Tony Awards, including Best Score and Best Book, and the Drama Desk Award for Best Musical. Sondheim had wanted Into the Woods to be funny, and it has many very funny moments: the vaudeville Witch, the bluey Wolves, the eternally vocalizing Rapunzel, the madly single Jack and his long-suffering Mother, the double-taking Baker and his deadpan Wife, the pair of amorous, self-absorbed Princes. Whot but Sondheim could get so many laughs from a heartfelt dolt about “Agony”? In spite of the laughter in these woods, however, they are also, like those other woods, a plunge into the dark woods. Robert Frost wrote about, “dark and deep” Into the Woods may be darker and deeper than anything else either man has done before, perhaps because they are conjuring with fairy tales: stories as powerful as the imaginations that created and preserved them, as mysterious and magical as the dreams they’ve inspired and the nightmares they’ve caused.

Wilhelm Grimm referred to these stories as “innocent household tales” and said the tales were “sufficiently important to children because they are one of the few sources of information and good advice.” (1812, p. 3.)

“In order to master the psychological problems of growing upuję

overcoming narcissistic disappointments, bad disappointments, sickness, rivalries; becoming able to relinquish childish roles, gaining a feeling of selfhood and of self-worth, and a sense of moral obligation.”

Children have a deep need to know the world, their need not to get lost in the woods. “In fairy tales,” Sondheim wrote, “being lost in the forest is a central theme. In the wood, children are suspended in the world one should be found, but rather that one must find or discover oneself.” As Sondheim and Lapine understood, this was a form of knowledge. A cartoon by Stevenson published in The New Yorker in 1980 addressed this theme. He showed two men in a study, and its caption was in the form of dialogue:

“All right, Wilhelm, we have a problem.”

“Please, Joseph, don’t you think we’ve been using the woods too much.”

“Woods are always good. Without them, does the child do well?”

“Perhaps a dwarf or a beast.”

“We die of a lack of dwarf stuff.”

“How about a wolf.”

So the children meets the Wolf. Little Red Ridinghood can’t escape her destiny: the Wolf lives in the woods, you have to go through them to get to Grandmama’s house and to get her to get home (Hans My Hedgehog), where wild animals tear people to pieces (Brother and Sister), where sorcerers cut off the heads of overjoyed, curious girls (Fitcher’s Feather Bird), where parents abandon their children (Hansel and Gretel), where princesses with golden hair just like their dead mothers refuse to hide when their fathers want to marry them (Mac-Fair), where witches keep girls in towers with glass doors or doors and blinded princes woop weeping (Rapunzel), where cruel queens send their stepdaughters to be hunted by huntsmen (Snow White and the Seven Dwarf).”

There are wolves in the woods, wolves, kings, sorcerers, witches, princes and dwarfs: you can immediately see why every child would want to go there.

What are the woods: they begin with the town stops, where civilization things can change, merge, and melt together. They have a great deal to do with how children merge with the ways of the world. They are a place of mingled terror and delight while listening to a fairy tale. They go beyond the world that is familiar to them: they are curious. Because they are human. Because they can’t be innocent all their lives. Because they can’t be innocent. They need to grow up, whether they want to or not. They go into the woods because they must.

The woods change, of course—but perhaps every man and woman, fears and desires change. The forest of the fairy tales is the forest of Eden: the trees hang heavy with forbidden fruit. “You’ve changed,” the Baker’s Wife tells him. “You’re different in the woods...”

The fruit of the knowledge of Good and Evil. Little Red Ridinghood has tasted that fruit in the woods. She disobeyed her mother by not sticking to the path, she undressed and got into bed with the Wolf (that’s Grimm, first edition), she felt both “excited and scared” (that’s Sondheim), she was eaten up by the Wolf, but she’s still alive because she was cut out of his stomach. She’s had a not-untypical adventure in the woods. “And I know things...”

Many valuable things./ That I didn’t know before.” She’s glad, too, on balance. She understands how there that the transaction has not been without cost. “Isn’t it nice to know a lot?” she sings... “and a little bit not...”

Against May, Whitewday, or other time of the year, any youths and maidens, old men and wines, run gadding over night to the woods, groves, hills, and mountains, where they spend all the night in pleasant pastimes... I have heard it credibly reported... that of forty, three-score, or a hundred running to the wood over night, there have scarceoly the third part of them returned home again unscolded.”

What you have, before you go into the woods, is innocence. What you have in the woods is knowledge. All the Sondheim-Lapine characters have different, and very good, reasons, reasons, for plunging into the woods, but there is one essential reason, understood by all who ever felt that the world is too small and the kernel of mingled terror and delight while listening to a fairy tale. They go beyond the world that is familiar to them: they are curious. Because they are human. Because they can’t be innocent all their lives. Because they can’t be innocent. They need to grow up, whether they want to or not. They go into the woods because they must.

With Sondheim and Lapine to guide them, these fairy tale creatures know the woods, they know how to plunge into the woods again; and, at least for the evening—before dark—we’ll go with them.

—FRESH DOTTIE, an Associate Article of the FJ. The woods, a song changed by Nicholas Sander, of Anton Ulenspiegel’s last play. The woods, a song changed by Nicholas Sander, of Anton Ulenspiegel’s last play. The woods, a song changed by Nicholas Sander, of Anton Ulenspiegel’s last play.
VANESSA WILLIAMS (Whit). Although she has achieved international fame for her recording and acting careers, theatre is Vanessa Williams’ first love. A native New Yorker, she majored in musical theatre at Syracuse University and took Broadway by storm in 1994, when she replaced Chita Rivera in the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical, The Habsburg. Previously, she had appeared off-Broadway in One Man Band and the Los Angeles production of Checkmates. She starred in the 1998 Encore! Series staged concert production and cast recording of St. Louis Woman and she created the role of Queenie in The Public Theater's workshop production of The Wild Party. She has starred in such films as Soul Food, Evan's, Dancer With Me and Shaft. Her television credits include "Boy Bye Baby", "The Odyssey" and "The Courageous Love", which she also produced, as well as the television movie, "Keep the Faith, Baby". Ms. Williams dedicates each performance to her four children.

JOHN MCMANUS (Narnarou/Mysterious Mary) most recently starred in the world premiere of Sander and Ribe's The Visit opposite Chita Rivera at the Goodman Theatre. Broadway credits: Unlucky in High Society (Tony nomination). Cap'n Andy in Show Boat (Tony nomination). Folies (original production). Great God Brown (Drama Desk Award); Sweet Charity opposite Gwen Verdon (Tony nomination). Juan Juan (Drama Desk and Tony nominations). Love for Love: The Visit; Artist Descending A Staircase. Off-Broadway: Little Mary Sunshine (Theatre World Award; TV: "Fatter Tails From the City" (Showtime); "Dr." (HBO); "Frazer," "Cheers." "Coach" and the Emmy Award-winning specials "Concealed Enemies," "Murrow," "Citizen Coho," "Separate But Equal". Film: Sweet Charity. All the President's Men; Legal Eagles; Ponies From Reveno. Bookend: "Blow Out"; A Shock to the System: Native Son and the Australian Film The Club.

LAURA BENANTI (Cinderella) was last seen on Broadway in Swing for which she received a Tony nomination. Other Broadway and off-Broadway credits include Maria in The Sound of Music opposite Richard Chamberlain, Elvira in Whirled in (City Center Encore) and Julia in Time and Again (MITC). Regional credits: Mom of the Manchu (Papernell Playhouse); Road to Hollywood (O'Neill Theater Center); and Prelude in the Winter's Tale (Williamstown Theater Festival). Laura has been a part of many readings, workshop and recordings. Love and thanks to Emily Germon Saines (and company), David Kaylor and her wonderful friends and family.

GREGG EDELMAN (Cinderella's Prince/Wolf) was last seen on stage in the off-Broadway musical Rabbit's Revenge. Prior to that, he starred in the Lee Blessing play Thief of Time. His previous Broadway credits include 1776 (Drama Desk Award, Tony nomination), City of Angels (Tony nomination), A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Follies, Fasino and Les Misérables. His film credits include Crimes and Misdemeanors, Green Card, the unreeleased City By The Sea and Woody Allen's spring project. However, he is proud of his marriage to actresses Caroleree Carmello and their two children, Gwyn and Ethan.

STEPHEN DeROSA (Baker). Broadway: The Man Who Came to Dinner (Roundabout); Off-Broadway: New Yorkers (MTC); 4 1/2 Girls (York); Wonderful Town; Do Re Mi (Encore!); The Mystery of Irma Vep; Love's Fire (Acting Company: Public). Regional: Guthrie and ASCA Barbican. Regional: Williamstown Theatre Festival; Huntington Theatre; Globe Theatre; Andor Theatre and many others. C.D.: Infinite Joy: The Songs of William Film. Television: "Law & Order." "Suddenly Susan." "Third Watch." MFA: Yale School of Drama. This performance is dedicated to the memory of my father.

KERRY O'MALLEY (Baker's Wife). Broadway: Amiee Get Your Gun (Dorothy Tate); w/b Johanna McElgun in: Carousel; Translations, Encore!; Promises; Promises (opposite Martin Short). International tour: The Pugh and the Stairs, Off-Broadway: How I Learned To Drive, Bright Lights Big City (Megan), Over the River and Through the Woods (Chicago). Regional: The Overcoat (Drake) and The Unlikely Molly Brown (Molly, Sacramento). Film & TV: Series regular on "Covette" (Fox) and "The Mike O'Malley Show" (NBC); "NYTD Blue." "Law & Order." "Brooklyn South." "Bozard's." Graduate: Duke. Marie. MARYLOU SURRE (Jack's Mother). Recent TV credits: D’Arcy, Under the Gun (Seach); "Law & Order." "Brooklyn South." "Bozard's." Graduated: Duke. Marie. MARYLOU BARRETT (Jack's Mother). Recent TV credits: D‘Arcy, Under the Gun (Seach); "Law & Order," "Brooklyn South." "Bozard's." Graduated: Duke. Marie.

Molly Ephraim (Little Red Ridinghood) is thrilled to be making her L.A. debut. Philadelphia credits: The Snow Queen (Goethe); Into the Woods (Little Red Ridinghood) receiving a Barrymore nomination. New York credits: staged reading of Ring Island Christmas (Sondheim); reading of Great Expectations (Young Essela); and American Musical Theatre Expo: Patricia Ritch. Regional: South Pacific (Njana); Fiddler on the Roof (Jocelyn Dulaney); Cansu, Nutzvker (Clara). Heartfelt thanks to Pat B., Tony H., Lee, Donna, E., Nancy E., Ricardo M., Philly friends, her family and the Into the Woods team.

CHRISTOPHER SIEBER (Rumpelstiltskin for Cinderella's Prince). New York: Disney's Beauty and the Beast (Gaston): Triumph of Love (Agi), A Christmas Carol (Young Jacob Marley), AITW (Bran): The Boys in the Band (Donald); Pal Joey. Tours of The Music of Andrew Lloyd Webber and Me and My St. Louis (Boy Next Door). Television: "Two of a Kind," the "Sex," the "Ed," "Guiding Light," "All My Children," "Another World." Regionally: Randy Newman's poster at the Lion Festival; Papermill Playhouse: The Boys from Syracuse at Regency.


STEPHEN BERGER (understudy for Baker/Naasor/Mysterious Man/Cinderella’s Father/Seaweed, Broadway: The Dinner Party: True West; Laughing on the 7th Floor; Little Me: NY; Operas; Wonderful Town; Off-Broadway: A New Musical: Helga Mushah, Hella Fuddah; Jesus Fest: Isn’t It Romantic; Night Club: Confidential National Tours: Runners: Amiee Ken Hill’s Phantasm. TV: "Thames Right." "All My Children." "Law & Order." Stephen is married to actress Jam Leigh Herron.


TRACY NICOLE CHAPMAN (Frong/understudy for Witch). Broadway: The Lion King (Shurtleff), original cast recording. The Witch Man 2000 revival (Eliee Tofelmeister), original cast recording. The Witch’s Tommy (Acid Queen Jr.), original.
collaboration with the Museum of Contemporary Art. She has been a consultant for the NEA, the PEW Charitable Trust, Theater Communications Group, the Rockefeller and Lila Wallace Readers Digest Foundation and has written for American Theater Magazine. Her adaptation of Truman Capote’s *A Christmas Memory* was presented by the Mark Taper Forum for 10 consecutive years and toured Eastern Europe.

DOUGLAS C. BAKER (General Manager, Center Theatre Group) is now in his 12th season at CTG. Prior to moving West in 1990, his Broadway managing credits include *Prelude to a Kiss*, *Annie*, *Miss Hannigan’s Revenge*, *Try* starring Robert Morse, *Born Yesterday* starring Ed Asner and Madeline Kahn, *The Gospel at Colonus*, *Annie*, *A Chorus Line*, *Working* and *The Wiz*. His previous association with CTG came when he served as general manager, as well as tour director and booker, for *Legends* starring Mary Martin and Carol Channing, which had its world premiere at the Ahmanson Theatre in 1986. From 1982-85, Baker was executive director of the Independent Booking Office in New York City, a not-for-profit booking and information agency jointly established in 1957 by The League of New York Theatres and Producers and legitimate theatre owners/operators nationwide. He is a graduate of Albion College and is a member of the Association of Theatrical Press Agents and Managers where he serves on the Board of Governors. He is a founding trustee of Musical Theatre Works, a non-profit theatre based in New York, devoted to the development of new American musicals.

CHARLES DILLINGHAM (Managing Director, Center Theatre Group) supervises all development, marketing, administrative and financial aspects of the Ahmanson Theatre and the Mark Taper Forum. Prior to joining Center Theatre Group, he was president and C.E.O. of an international production and management company in New York which presented the Bolshoi Ballet, Bolshoi Opera, Kirov Ballet, Kirov Opera, and Royal Ballet at the Metropolitan Opera House and on national tour. He was the general manager and then executive director of American Ballet Theatre for eight years, during which time the world-renowned company toured to Paris and Japan, made ten television productions, and mounted 75 new productions. He previously served as managing director of the Brooklyn Academy of Music Theatre Company, and as general manager of the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco, and as an independent producer. He has served on the board of Directors of Theatre L.A. and on theatre advisory panels at the California Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.

GORDON DAVIDSON (Artistic Director/Producer, Center Theatre Group) is now in his 13th season as Artistic Director/Producer for the Ahmanson Theatre, and for which he directed Leonard Bernstein’s *Candide*. He has been Artistic Director of the Mark Taper Forum throughout its 35-year history. During that period, he has guided over 250 major productions to the Taper stage while also overseeing the numerous special projects sponsored by the Taper. He was instrumental in moving the following Taper world premieres to Broadway: *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*, *The Shadow Box*, *Zoot Suit*, *Children of a Lesser God*, *Division Street*, *Burn This*, *Rosa and Twilight: Los Angeles*, 1992. His stage directing credits include QED, *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer* (N.Y. Drama Desk Award), *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine* (Tony nomination), *Obie* and L.A. Drama Critics Circle Awards, *Savages* (Obie, Outer Critics and LADCC Awards), *The Shadow Box* (Tony, Outer Critics and LADCC Awards) and *Children of a Lesser God* (Tony Award nomination) and, most recently, *Nine Armenians*. For the Ahmanson-at-the-Doolittle, he directed Stephen Sondheim’s *A Little Night Music*. In addition, he has directed many operas for companies around the world. On film, he served as executive producer of *Zoot Suit* and *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*. Among the many special awards he has received are a Tony Award for theatrical excellence, a LADCC Award for distinguished achievement, two Margo Jones Awards for encouraging new plays and playwrights, the John Harvard Award for community service, a Telluride Association Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship and the 1990 Governor’s Award for the Arts, which honored his contributions to the performing arts in California. Mr. Davidson received his B.A. from Cornell University, and holds honorary degrees from CalArts, Pasadena Playhouse, Claremont and Brooklyn College and was awarded the first annual Art and Social Conscience Award from Loyola Marymount University. He received an Honorary Gold Card membership from the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Local 33, and was awarded a Mr. George Abbott Award for Lifetime Achievement by the Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, was appointed by President Clinton to the National Council on the Arts, and was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame.
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The stage crew, wardrobe crew, hair & make-up crew and box office staff are represented by the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States of America and Canada, AFL-CIO, CRTC, Local Numbers 33, 768, 706 and 857, respectively.

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FEBRUARY 2002

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Anita

“Gentlemen Prefer Blondes,” concluded the
brunette and brassy, one-and-only
Anita Loos

Shakespeare and Shylock
continued from page 10
rather than his involuntary follower Freud, is our psychologist.”

Southern California theatergoers have a rare theatrical opportunity in March, when the San Diego Repertory Theatre presents The Merchant of Venice in tandem with Mark Leiten-Young’s Shylock. According to the playwright, this is the second time his play has been produced side by side with Shakespeare’s. In Shylock, a fictional Jew named Jon Davies is condemned by his own community for his portrayal of Shakespeare’s Jew. An outraged theatre present Davies’“vile portrayal of Shylock as a vicious Jew-

ish villain,” effecting an early closing notice. Shylock consists of Davies’ post-performance discussion with the audience after the final curtain. Though unconfirmed that Shakespeare was anti-Semitic, Leiten-Young does not believe he created Shylock to promote good-will towards Jews. His play concerns censorship, Shakespeare, Shylock, and what it feels like for Jon Davies to be called a racist. “I wanted to explore the question that perhaps Shakespeare’s play is dangerous,” says Leiten-Young. “If we’re going to talk about censorship, let’s make Davies’ Shylock an offensive one, dearly a racist Jew.” Actor Ron Campbell is ecstatic. “I have to come up with multiple Shylocks,” he says. “The Shylock Jon Davies plays, the different Shylocks he presents in Mark’s play, and the one that Ron Campbell wants to spend the evening with in Sam Woodhouse’s production of Merchant.” “What’s more important than the hours one spends in the theater is what happens in the car ride on the way home,” says Shylock director Todd Saloway. Six months after Shylock premiered, Davies recently received an e-mail from a couple who said they were still debating the issues. “If the play gets people talking and pro-

voke them to seek out the truth, then the theater is succeeding way beyond box office or applause,” says Saloway. Bloom attributed The Merchant of Venice virtuosity to “the ways in which it speaks a bedrock of attitudes about the racial, national, sexual, and religious difference of others. I can think of no other literary work that does so unselfishly and honestly,” he writes. “This is why censoring the play is always more dangerous than staging it.”

Charles Ballbridge is a freelance writer, critic, and essayist who specializes in arts and culture.

Saul Tropic’s "The Merchant of Venice" by William Shakespeare is presented at Mad Cow’s Smathers Theatre from November 13-30, 2008. The show stars Kジョnob Gozzi, Charles Ballbridge, and Saul Tropic. Saul Tropic’s "The Merchant of Venice" is directed by Robert Hays and produced by Mad Cow’s Artistic Director, John Patrick Dunne. Saul Tropic’s "The Merchant of Venice" is the first in a series of five plays that will be presented during the 2008-2009 season. 

BY LIBBY SLATE

Remember the song from South Pacific about “Honey Bun,” who was “only 60 inches high” and a “hundred and one pounds of fun”?

Well, subtract one inch and nine pounds, and you had a real-life honey bun in the person of Anita Loos, who wrote it while still a schoolgirl never to be bored and kept that vivacity brilliantly. Whether it was running off to marry as a teenager (for one might only, mind you), writing witty subtitles for the silent films of Douglas Fairbanks, helping to put the tour in the Roaring Twenties with her Jazz Age novel Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, or sitting at the Algonquin literary Round Table, Loos led the highlife, sparkling like the diamonds that the musical version of Blondes famously decreed to be a girl’s best friend.

Born most likely in 1895 (some sources say 1888) in what is now Mount Shasta, California, Loos began acting as a child at the San Francisco theater managed by her best vivant father. As a teenager she left acting for writing, having learned about story structure and dialogue from her stage experience. Her first produced scenario, The New York Hat, was filmed in 1912 by silent film pioneer D.W. Griffith and starred Mary Pickford and Lionel Barrymore. Four years later, her clever titles for the Douglas Fairbanks films His Picture in the Papers so successful that Griffith assigned her to write the landmark Lomedel. She went on to write numerous films for Fairbanks, developing a reputation for her satirical flair. In 1919 she married the cowriter and director of many of her films, John Emerson, and moved to New York, where she also wrote and produced their own films. In all, Loos wrote more than 60 silent films.

“It’s the writer’s own personality that makes the story,” Loos told Photoplay magazine in 1921. “That’s why I try to keep myself happy and cheerful. I have a motto which is the key to my charac-
ter: ‘High O’ Heart, toujours High O’ Heart.’”

It was perhaps that personality then, which propelled Loos into the heart of the 1920s flapper era. She bobbed her hair, shortened her hemlines, and in 1925 wrote a serial for Harper’s Bazaar about a flippant gold digger named Lorelei Lee who sailed to Paris with her friend Dorothy in search of a husband and then returned to America to marry a millionaire. The story was inspired by a cross-country train trip on which the brumette writer was ignored by all the male onboard, until instead entered the very need of blonde across Mac Davis; the married Loos was already annointed that writing critic H.L. Mencken had chosen to romance Davis instead of herself.

Published as a novel in 1926, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes became an international hit. It inspired a silent film, a play, and two musical spinoffs—the 1949 Broadway show and the 1953 movie starring Marilyn Monroe. A sequel, But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes, was published in 1928.

Loos made a successful transition to “talkies,” writing the screenplays for such films as San Francisco, The Widows, and I Married an Angel as well as co-writing Gentlemen Prefer Blondes. Her stage version of Coleen’s Gig became the basis for the film. She also wrote several autobiographies, which critics deemed inaccurate but nevertheless hilarious. She even briefly returned to acting, guest starring in the 1960s television series and Live. Lee Soffa”.

Loos died in New York on August 18, 1981. As an epigraph, one might refer to a college Loos gave for actress Tallulah Bankhead in 1966. Just substitute the names “Tallulah never bored anyone,” she said, “and I consider that humanitarianism of a very high order indeed.”

Libby Slate is a Los Angeles-based writer who contributes regularly to Performing Arts Magazine.

RAPIDSKO presents Gentlemen Prefer Blondes March 5-17 at UCLA’s Freud Playhouse. For tickets and more information, call (310) 825-2101 or visit www.freudplayhouse.com.