‘Into the woods I have to go ... I hate to leave ... I have to though ...’

In Term 3 the Middle School ventured into the woods, in search of the biennial Musical. It was a challenging journey that brought the 100-strong cast, orchestra and crew a wonderful adventure, while introducing a new generation of students to the complex, quirky and thought-provoking music and lyrics of Stephen Sondheim’s classic score under the experienced direction of Mrs Spargo, Mr Pope and Ms English.

Sondheim’s Into the Woods is a challenging musical that combines the stories of Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, Rapunzel and Jack and the Beanstalk with an entirely new fairytale, ‘The Baker and his Wife’. Told by the Witch from next door (Ella) that they must venture into the woods, the Baker (Michael) and his Wife (Katie) head off in search of ‘a cow as white as milk’ (from Jack), ‘a cape as red as blood’ (from Red Riding Hood), ‘hair as yellow as corn’ (from Rapunzel) and ‘a slipper as pure as gold’ (from Cinderella) in order to break the curse upon their house. In a madcap first act, they undertake their quest into the eerie butoh-inspired woods created through evocative contemporary dance, choreographed by Ms Feldhoff and Mr Fuller. There they encounter a range of memorable characters, including the mischievous Red Riding Hood (Olivia and Helena); the seductive Wolf (Huy); the exhausted Cinderella (Elana and Bianca), who are both equally tired of the ball and of running from their Prince; the trapped and bored Rapunzel (Gemma and Mariah), who ‘just wanted to see the world’; two Princes, ‘each more handsome than the other’ (Oliver and Avishai); and the wellmeaning Jack (Elliott and Dilan) and his beloved cow, Milky White.

With a colourful chorus of storybook characters, the first act was full of action and hilarious musical highlights, including the Witch’s vegetable garden rap, ‘Don’t ever ever ever mess around with my greens ... especially the beans!’; the romantic waltz of the Baker and his Wife, It takes two; and the seductive Hello Little Girl, performed by Red Riding Hood, two wolves and three of the cutest little pigs in storybook history. Ultimately, all is resolved and the inevitable happy ending is achieved—by the end of the first act.

In many ways the second act is an entirely different play, as the Giant’s wife descends the beanstalk to avenge the death of her husband, causing havoc and chaos wherever her giant footsteps tread. The characters choose to return to the woods, to find the Giant’s wife and to seek something more, but in a dangerous and treacherous journey they encounter only disaster, grief and loss.

Here they discover that neither blaming each other nor running away will solve their problems, but rather they must pull together to defeat the Giant and to carve a better future for themselves in a world that is entirely more familiar than the storybook world we first meet. This act contains some of the most beautiful numbers in the musical, with highlights being the Witch’s (Ella) powerful rendition of the The Last Midnight, the Mysterious Man’s (Tim) and the Baker’s (Michael Baker-Stimson) haunting No more and the gentle and moving final chorus containing No-one is Alone and Children Will Listen.

Ultimately, Into the Woods is a powerful allegorical tale that reminds us all that, in the face of adversity, we are never alone; that, while wishes and magic are so very attractive, life’s greatest rewards lie in our human capacity for courage, resilience, compassion and love. Certainly, we found many examples of that as the cast, crew and orchestra overcame countless obstacles and solved a myriad of challenges to produce a first-class musical of which they can be justly proud.

Congratulations to the many students and staff who gave creative life to this 2012 production. While paying homage to the memorable Pembroke production of 2000, a living woods designed by Mr Ferrier, Mr Costi and the Visual Art and Design and Technology Departments and striking original costumes designed in the style of steam punk by Ms Lacoon and Ms Cowell and a team of talented costume design students, made the 2012 production unique. Thanks too to Artist-in- Residence Warren Bradley, for a spell-binding lighting design and to technical wizards Mrs Jones and Mr Gum for realising the dream in the theatre.

It is one of the great rewards of the performance process that so many creative imaginations and talented young artists combine to create a new, fresh interpretation of a classic work that becomes our own and will linger in collective memory for generations to come.

Ms English
Director
The cast of *Into the Woods*

Ella (Yr 10) as the Witch, Michael (Yr 11) as the Baker and Katie (Yr 10) as The Baker’s Wife.

Olivia (Yr 9) as Little Red Riding Hood and Huy (Yr 10) as the Wolf.

Avishai (Yr 9) as the Prince.

Elana (Yr 10) as Cinderella, Sabrina (Yr 9) and Imogen (Yr 10) as The Stepsisters.