

Actress takes on the titans in Into The Woods



By Brock Weir

Settling into her makeup chair to have her face gnarled and her teeth snagged, Aurora's Traci Alexander knows she has big shoes to fill as The Witch in Stephen Sondheim's *Into The Woods*.

It is a role originated on Broadway by Bernadette Peters, who was followed in the role by the likes of Vanessa Williams and Phylicia Rashad before being tackled on the big screen by film titan Meryl Streep. But, while the actresses – particularly Peters – have served as an inspiration for Ms. Alexander, she's determined to make the role her own.

"This is a show I have loved for a long time," says Ms. Alexander, 27. "I really respect Bernadette Peters as an actress and performer and, because she was the original witch, that was something I was really drawn to. The film adaptation was not my favourite, but I love a lot of the actors who are in it. Johnny Depp was really good in it, as was Meryl Streep, so to be able to be in a show that so many respected actors have been in was really a highlight for me."

In honing her own interpretation of The Witch for this week's production of the musical staged by the Aurora-based Wavestage Theatre Company, she is taking what she enjoyed best about each of their performances and putting a distinctive twist on the role.

"Something our director really wanted us to do – and something she found magical about *Into the Woods* – is to really hold the comedy to it," she says. "I think it is definitely a good comedic part which, unfortunately, is something I think was missing from the film adaptation."

Ms. Alexander first had the spark of musical theatre lit in her as a child of four. One of her first shows was playing the Mayor of Oz in *The Wizard of Oz*. Positive feedback she got from her performance encouraged her to keep going. Last year, she joined the Wavestage Company, responding to an ad on Facebook promoting auditions for their production of *Legally Blonde: The Musical*. A fan of both the Reese Witherspoon movie and the Broadway adaptation, it was an opportunity she couldn't let pass by.

"What I really liked about Wavestage is that there were other people doing the same thing in a really challenging atmosphere," she says. "They have really helped me grow as a performer."

Into the Woods follows classic fairy tales such as Little Red Riding Hood and Cinderella, but shines a light on what happens after the Happily Ever After. It provides a little something everyone can relate to, says Ms. Alexander, and a nice dose of magic on stage.

"If you're really looking for a good form of entertainment and a good way to really enjoy something, this is it," she says. "Everyone can relate to some character. You're going to leave with a smile on your face and a lesson learned."

Wavestage's production of *Into The Woods* opens at the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts this Thursday, July 9, running at select times through Sunday. For tickets and show times, visit wavestagetheatre.com.