



# INTO THE WOODS

## **Study Guide**

by Amelia Johnson

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## Introduction to the Woods

James Lapine, born on January 10, 1949, wrote the book for *Into the Woods*. He is a director and a playwright, and he has won the Tony Award for Best Book of a Musical three times.



James Lapine who wrote the Book for *Into the Woods*.



A young Stephen Sondheim, who wrote the music for *Into the Woods*.

Born on March 22, 1930, Stephen Sondheim is a composer and lyricist who has contributed greatly to the musical theatre world. Some of his notable works include *Company*, *Follies*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, and the lyrics for *West Side Story*. Sondheim has received several awards, including eight Tony Awards, eight Grammys, a Laurence Olivier Award, and a Pulitzer Prize.

## Fun Facts

- \* The original Broadway production of *Into the Woods* ran for 765 performances.
- \* On opening night Stephen Sondheim gave each of the cast members sterling silver “magic beans” engraved with the date, his or her initials, SS (for Stephen Sondheim), and the word “THANKS.”
- \* Sondheim stated that the song “No One Is Alone” is not about feeling alone but about how “every action you take has a reaction, and everything you do affects everything around you.”

## Dramaturg’s Note

I was blessed to have parents who told me stories. Though I was exposed to traditional tales, I loved all the variations of these stories. I learned about courage, kindness, and determination. I learned that individuals can overcome challenges and make a difference in the world. What I love about *Into the Woods* is that although it is set in a fairy-tale world, everything is not magically resolved. You see the consequences of people’s choices. Though we are not in control of all the obstacles we will face, we decide how we work through these things. We choose whether our story ends with certain obstacles, or whether we take the opportunity to let those experiences stretch us into the people we want to be. There are many factors that inform our decisions, but we make the choices that bring us the consequences we live with. We are bound to make mistakes at some point in our lives, and sometimes it is hard to live with the consequences. However, I firmly believe that there is always a way to move forward. No matter what darkness we pass through, I know that it is always possible to find the light that will guide us to where we need to be.

—Amelia Johnson



James Lapine at the Peabody Awards by Charles Manley, © 2014, Wikimedia Commons. Licensed under CC-BY-2.0

## James Christensen

On January 8th of this year, artist and former BYU faculty member James Christensen passed away. Though he was born in Culver City, California, he has contributed greatly to the Utah community as well as the art world. His whimsical images transported viewers to other places. As a tribute to him, costume designer Dennis Wright and makeup designer Sarah Bult have based their designs on his artwork under the direction of Dallyn Vail Bayles.



**“I feel very strongly that you do art because you can’t be happy doing anything else; you can’t not do art. That’s the way I was. It’s the desire, the fire in the belly, the way your brain is wired.”**

—James Christensen

## Q&A with Costume Designer, Dennis Wright

**How did you start the design process?**

I did A LOT of research on Christensen’s art work, which was a great fun, because I enjoy his art so much. I found drawings and paintings that correspond to each character, and made inspiration boards to gather and combine these looks and ideas. This research informed and inspired my own work.

**What has been your favorite part of the experience?**

Putting the pieces together! Each costume has multiple fabrics and trims, along with asymmetrical designs and each look is put together piece by piece. It has been a tremendous amount of work for me as the designer, and for the costume shop! But as each costume comes together and takes shape, it’s like watching a James Christensen painting come to life. It’s magical.

**What have been some of the challenges that you have run into during the design process?**

In designing with this inspiration, there are a lot of fabrics and design details that have to be considered. There are over 500 different fabrics in the show! That is a lot of decision making and coordination.



ILLUSTRATION BY DENNIS WRIGHT

## Q&A with Makeup and Hair Designer, Sarah Bult

**What did you think when Dallyn first mentioned that he wanted the costumes to pay a tribute to James Christensen?**

I was very excited. As a designer and an artist I have always been very drawn to bold colors and odd and unusual ways of looking at things. Before I started designing I was an artist, and art is something that has no rules when it comes to an individual’s style. James Christensen was one of my first exposures to artwork where I saw a different bold style. I realized whatever you do with your art it doesn’t matter if it fits a mold of what has been done before or if it follows the rules of what is considered art. In fact it’s those who break the mold and create new fun ways of looking at things that make the largest impact on people.

**How familiar with James Christensen before this? If you weren’t very familiar with him, what did you learn through the design process?**

As I grew up in Salt Lake City, I saw James Christensen’s art all the time and I always loved his work even though I didn’t associate the paintings with the specific artist till later in life. I always immediately recognized the fun quirky colorful paintings. I am heavily inspired by stories, character, bold colors, and unique images, all of which James Christensen incorporated into his own work. Thinking back to my childhood I can see the role that his artwork played in shaping me as an artist and designer. I didn’t realize until this project that was why I loved his artwork growing up. It really communicates so well with my own personal style and view of the world and I was thrilled to be designing a tribute performance inspired by his work.



**How have you used his designs to influence your work?**

After reading the script I looked through as many James Christensen paintings as I could find. I picked out textures, colors, broke it all down and paired certain characters with those elements. His artwork influenced

everything from the shape and colors of hair down to the detail on the bead work of the hairpins. I loved that I could draw my inspiration from his work and create something that really embodied his artwork.

## The Value of Fairy Tales

Though fairy tales are in the realm of make-believe, they can be applicable in people's everyday life. These stories allow children to envision different worlds, with endless possibilities. They help promote children's imaginations and give them a safe environment to experience frightening things, while knowing that everything will be solved at the end of the story.

In his book *The Uses of Enchantment* Austrian psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim delved into the effects of fairy tales on children. He believed that these stories were important in the development of children.

- \* Fairy tales provide a way for children to make sense of the world. Because children are curious, they sometimes ask questions that they lack the intellectual maturity to understand. Though parents provide simple answers that make sense to them, these answers sometimes have no place in the child's understanding of the world. When children try to explain things the way their parents have explained them without understanding or believing them, they "begin to distrust their own experience and therefore themselves and what their minds can do for them" (48). Because of this, fairy tales can give children answers that make more sense to their interpretation of the world and make them feel more secure.
- \* These stories teach children about morality. Here, children learn the importance of kindness and the power of perseverance. They are able to relate to characters who are small like them, but who conquer their challenges.



**"Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed."**

— G. K. Chesterton

**"One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious."**

—Carl Jung



# Psychoanalysis of a Fairy Tale

Concerning fairy tales, Bruno Bettelheim wrote “The unrealistic nature of these tales (which narrow-minded rationalists object to) is an important device, because it makes obvious that the fairy tales’ concern is not useful information about the external world, but the inner process taking place in an individual.” Bettelheim saw that there were lessons to be learned from fairy tales, not only about the world around us but also about our development as individuals. What lessons can we learn from Cinderella?

## Cinderella

- \* Her goodness gives children hope that though they sometimes have evil thoughts, they can be good like Cinderella.
- \* Cinderella’s situation reminds children that things could be worse and they should be grateful for what they have.



ILLUSTRATION BY DENNIS WRIGHT



## Stepmother

- \* The cruelty of the stepmother and the feelings that they feel concerning her character help children feel validated in some of the meaner thoughts they may have about their siblings or of the family members.
- \* Children can learn that those who are cruel to them may simply be acting out of jealousy. This can encourage them to keep moving forward as they are.

Jack (Kristian Huff)  
Photographer: Savanna Richardson/BYU Photo

