

Nuts & Bolts

A college production of *Into the Woods* faces an interesting wardrobe dilemma.

Into the Woods

By Stephen Sondheim (music and lyrics) and James Lapine (book)

December 2004

Directed by Amy Rogers
Pace University
New York, NY

I was providing lighting design and technical direction for a recent Pace University production of Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods* when I came across a noteworthy staging challenge involving Cinderella's ballroom gown.

It was a scene in which Cinderella, desperately in need of a dress to wear to the ball, calls upon her mother's spirit to help her. Since the spirit lives in the upper branches of a tree, the dress needs to be dropped from above. To help us work out this effect, we needed the following supplies: two C-clamps, four eye bolts, one metal ring, a length of tie-line, one pulley and a lightweight item to be dropped.

The solution to our dilemma entailed building a drop mechanism that could be controlled by a technician near the fly rail. We took a plain piece of 1' x 4' lumber and attached it horizontally to a fly pipe using two sidearms. We then inserted three eye bolts into the 1' x 4' lumber. Two of them were located about an inch apart, near the center of the 1' x 4', with the third one near the

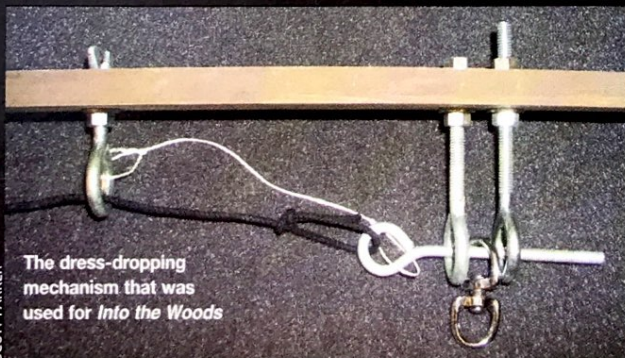
end of the 1' x 4' closest to the fly rail. A fourth eye bolt was also needed to hold the dress up. Because the dress needed to be attached to a tie-line, we sewed a metal ring (a D-ring) to the dress (it was extremely important for this ring to be properly attached to the dress). Along with the first two eye bolts, the fourth was also used to support the dress.

With a very long piece of tie-line tied to the eye of the fourth bolt, running along to the end of the pipe through a pulley, the offstage technician was able to release the dress and generate the effect. The third eye bolt, though, was the most important of them all. Without it, the technician who was controlling the mechanism for dropping the dress would be visible to the audience—and the dress could hit an actor in the head on its way down. The long tie-line, therefore, had to run through the third eye bolt on its way to the pulley and the offstage technician. Additionally, a safety piece of tie-line was used to attach the released eye bolt to the third eye bolt. Why? After the technician pulled the tie-line, we had to prevent the possibility of this dangling bolt from inching its way down into the audience's view.

The total budget for *Into the Woods* was \$8,000. **SD**

Proud of a recent solution you found to a technical theater-related problem? If so, send your story (400 words or less) to editor@stage-directions.com to be considered for a future installment of Answer Box.

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The dress-dropping mechanism that was used for *Into the Woods*

SCOTT PARKER