

THE STORY OF PETER PAN

J.M. Barrie's 100 year old story of the boy who did not want to grow up has, at its core, the words of Peter Pan as he duels with Captain Hook: "I'm youth!" he cries. It is the story of the search for the land of lost content: Never Never Land where the Lost Boys live. It still resonates with the young and the not so young who are moved by Barrie's gift for nostalgia and whimsy to lament their own lost youth. Peter Pan is also all about stories and their importance to the listener, the teller – and – in this production the journalists who have a newspaper to fill. All this was laid before us by a gifted team of actors, musicians, artists, stage builders and backstage workers who created a fantastic evening of fun.



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Brackenlea (John Amos) and a confused and bumbling Count of Malms (your own Simon Theobalds) took their seats at the side, before launching into their barnstorming song "A Rum old pair" (Photo 1).

The setting for the opening was the Kensington home of Mr Darling ("this tie won't tie") played by Nick Wells in the black eyebrows of another Mr Darling, and his elegantly dressed wife played by Sheila Forbes, both of them seasoned and accomplished actors.



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Izzie Hanson in the major role of Wendy (photo 2) turned in an outstanding performance both for her acting and even more for her singing. Her two songs ('Straight on till morning' and later 'A Tear in a Pirate's Eye') were genuinely moving, delivered as they were in her clear and lovely voice and matched by her beautiful appearance.

Strong support was given to her by her younger brothers Michael (Ewan Munro) wedded to his Game Boy and John (Dominic Pennycook) who gave as good as they got in a riotous pillow fight until they were called to order by their nanny, a dog called Nanna

Simon Theobalds, building on past triumphs, had the ideas and skills to write a cleverly constructed script which was very faithful to the story of Peter Pan whilst converting the Lost Boys into journalists fleeing from Lord Leveson. An impeccably dressed Simon Forbes introduced the show and reminded the audience of their lines (Look behind you; Oh no you're not!). A haughty and "one up" "Lord

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played with terrific verve by Marcus Whitfield (photo 3). We were told that Nanna was a music loving dog (Pooch-enny) but it soon became apparent that her bark (J S Bach of course) was worse than her bite. Her song “It’s a dog’s life” was delivered with great panache.

Peter Pan (Emily Gaul) dressed in traditional Peter Pan garb and Tinker Bell (Annie Par-

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sons) (photo 4) come to the window to listen and later come inside when the children were asleep. No praise can be too high for Emily who carried the responsibility of the central role with the effortless assurance of a mature actress. Annie as the sometimes stroppy but ultimately co-operative Tinker bell gave an assured performance and produced the fairy

dust to enable the children to fly out of the window.

Act 2 opened in a blaze of light and colour, in contrast to the monochrome of Act 1, and we were in Never Never Land where we were introduced to the pirates (photo 6), as seamy a gang as one would not wish to meet on a dark night. Smee was played by James Marshall and managed to muck things up delightfully by being not the sharpest knife in the box but having a soft heart. Gentleman Starkey (Annie Townell) raised the tone being dressed in distinguished purple. Sheila Forbes played Bill Jukes whilst the pirate with the gift of getting practical things done was the diminutive “Noodler” deliciously played by Ellen Campbell.

The leader of the pirates was of course Captain Hook played by the versatile and talented Marcus Whitfield (photo 5) who showed that he could turn his paw or claw to anything. His acting carried the story along with gusto and his strong singing voice added to that. He was a thoroughly worthy “baddie.” Ann Jones as Tiger Lilly was authoritative and convincing as the leader of very youthful braves (Grace Campbell, Lily Chaplin-Rogers, Cecilia Kane,

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Ella Tyson and Freya Murchison) who delivered their war cries delightfully (photo 8).

Peter Pan was the leader of the lost boys (photo 7) who were played by seasoned actors Jon Hawkins (Curly) Anthony Fanshawe (Slightly) Colin Jones (Tootles) and by Katie Hurst (Nibs) all played with great verve.

After many adventures the climax came with the duel between Captain Hook and Peter Pan whose accomplished sword play was accompanied by special effects to create the clash of steel (photo 9). It was apparent that there was to be no Dead Pan ending and Hook was despatched into the jaws of the alarm clock eating crocodile. The concluding song (photo



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10) was delivered with lusty enthusiasm led from the front by John (Dominic Pennycook, who with the angelic golden haired looks of Oliver Twist and the voice of Aled Jones made a great contribution).

Martin Harris wrote the songs and lyrics and as both performer and leader of the band (Gordon Monro (drums) Fin O'Sullivan and Richard Croker (Bass) and David Woodward – who had also designed the ingenious set - (guitar)) gave the strongest of contributions to the evening.

Special mention must be made of the special effects, especially the flying scenes and the dramatic appearance of the crocodile at the end. The ingenious set was designed and built by David Woodward, the painted backdrop by Richard Osmond. An old friend of the pantomime, Kevin Hughes, was in charge of the lighting. Costume mistress Sarah Hawkins produced excellent outfits for everyone. Where did she get that dog? Claire Branford made sure the numerous sound effects came in 'bang' on time.

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Bryan Green had done most of the heavy lifting as stage manager when, sadly, he had to drop out just before the performances. Marc Townell took his place with great aplomb.

Eileen Gorrod is to be congratulated for her excellent direction. With the strong support of Marcus Whitfield, Emily Gaul, Izzie Hanson and the whole cast, backstage crew and the band she



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produced an evening to remember.

It was a great joy to see so many young members of the cast. Simon Theobalds and Martin Harris were enthusiastic and inventive as ever. Tony Bergstrom presided, as she has done for countless years with a benevolent eye and a sharp ear but had little to do as prompter.

This was a hugely enjoyable evening.

IAIN STREAT



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In case you missed the panto, or just to hear Izzie Hanson singing 'Straight on 'til morn-ing' again, search for 'Shawford Panto 2013' on YouTube.

Photos by Alan Carter:

1. Malms and Brackenlea
2. Wendy and John Darling
3. The cast sing 'Kensington Gardens'
4. Tinkerbell and Peter Pan
5. Pirates
6. Wendy's song makes the pirates cry
7. Peter Pan, Tinkerbell and the Lost Boys
8. Tiger Lilly and the Picalillies
9. Hook and Pan fight
10. The whole cast sing the finale



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