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# Saving a fairy's life

Thanks to Cathy Rigby in the leading role, the NSMT version of 'Peter Pan' is a classic

by Paul McMahon

'Peter Pan,' presented by the North Shore Music Festival, Beverly, Mass., through August 13.

Before you dismiss the possibility of getting yourself out to the North Shore Music Theatre in Beverly, to see their current (through August 13) and thoroughly delightful production of "Peter Pan," let me honestly encourage you to do so because it is truly magical.

Surely, we all know the classic James M. Barrie 1904 play "Peter Pan," a delightful fantasy tale about a young boy who refused to grow up—something many surely have wished not to do. Over the years since it was first presented, it has received countless treatments and interpretations and the title role has traditionally been played by a woman, until some recent British productions which featured male actors in the role; then there was the 1991 Steven Spielberg-directed film version of "Hook," which starred Robin Williams.

Some of the more famous women who have played Peter include Nina Boucicault (who originated the role), Maude Adams (the first to play the role in the United States), Betty Bronson (who played it on screen in 1924); there were also a 1953 animated Disney version with the voice of child star Bobby Driscoll, Marilyn Miller (Broadway in 1924), and Eva Le Gallienne (1928). In 1950 Leonard Bernstein wrote music and



L-R, Yvete Tucker (Tiger Lily) and Cathy Rigby (Peter) in 'Peter Pan.'  
Photo: Paul Lyden and Keven Lawson

lyrics for a Broadway production which starred former film star Jean Arthur, with character actor Boris Karloff (of Frankenstein fame) as Captain Hook, and which ran for 320 performances (setting a new record for the work) before it toured extensively.

However, the production that became the definitive one was the 1954 Broadway musical which starred Mary Martin in the title role. That production really became the hit that it still remains (although it only actually ran for 149 performances) when Martin recreated it live for television in 1955 and again

production of this same version stars the Olympic Medal-winning gymnast Cathy Rigby, who first played this role in the 1989 revival touring production (which actually opened in Boston, at the Colonial Theatre) and ended its tour in December of 1990 on Broadway, where it ran for a limited engagement of 45 performances (and three previews) and garnered a Tony Award nomination for its star. Rigby has since played this role on several occasions on Broadway and on tour and seems to just get better and better at it.

She is currently giving what this reviewer considers the definitive personification of everything one expects from this "boy who wouldn't grow up." She is totally agile and nimble, moving with the grace of a trained dancer and gymnast, but with the swagger of a self-assured boy. Her somewhat raspy voice is perfect as she boastfully "crows" over her various achievements and victories. She also displays a heart-warming vulnerability, admitting to wanting and actually needing the care and comfort of a mother "he" has long ago lost. Hers is a performance that will move you, entertain and delight you, and stay with you long after you leave the theatre.

Having seen Rigby play this role before, this reviewer felt sure that she would not disappoint, but how, I found myself wondering, would they manage to successfully recreate the flying that Peter Pan and the three Darling children are required to do? Have no fear: with what director Alan Coats and the flying illusions of ZFX, Inc., have created,

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'Peter Pan'

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everything is under control and the story's fanciful enchantment originally conceived, directed and choreographed by the late Jerome Robbins is intact.

David Masehneimer makes for a most entertaining Captain Hook, playing him with bigger than life gusto and bravado and equally scary-cat timidity whenever the stalking crocodile is around. He also is most effective as the mild-mannered and kindly Mr. Darling.

Young Elisa Sagardais quite lovely as the eldest of the Darling children, Wendy. She moves very well and has a sweet singing voice. She gets able assistance from Joseph Berardi, Jr., and Stephen Schapiro, as her younger brothers, John and Michael, respectively.

Special note should be made of Steven Petrillo's most unusual but very effective performance as both Nana, the large Saint Bernard dog who is the Darling children's fussy and caring nanny, and as the vindictive, kicking crocodile. He is also fine in a couple of lesser roles. He certainly has to be extraordinarily supple and limber for his two creature roles, and he is.

The production's physical and musical elements all add much to the magic, but the success of this particular "Peter Pan" is, in all honesty, thanks to the remarkable Cathy Rigby. It's a classic!

You all really do need to get yourself out to the North Shore Music Theatre to see "Peter Pan"; it is not every day that you have the opportunity to save the life of an endangered "fairy" simply by applauding. ▼