

# Charm, high spirits make 'Peter Pan' fly

By Ellen Pfeifer  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**BEVERLY** — In Sir James Barrie's play "Peter Pan," it is only the rare adult who has enough inner child left to see "the boy who wouldn't grow up" peeking into the nursery window. And no adult had enough of a fantasy life to actually journey to Neverland. But the North Shore Music Theatre's production of the musical "Peter Pan" has enough charm and high spirits to transport all viewers to that magical island inhabited by Indians, pirates, and a crocodile with a ticking clock in his belly.

Although the show serves as a vehicle for Cathy Rigby, who practically owns the title role, there is a hard-working and tightly coordinated ensemble surrounding her and a physical production that is clever and evocative. Scene designer John Iacovelli and lighting designer Tom Sturge have created a London nursery for the Darling children complete with beds, a doghouse for Nana, a dollhouse that lights up when inhabited by Tinkerbell, and a rocking chair that rocks and drawers that open and shut when animated by the invisible fairy. Marooner's Rock, where the Princess Tiger Lily almost meets her doom, is a believably craggy outcrop that emerges from the mist. The pirate ship, although necessarily reduced by in-the-round logistics to the essentials of a folded sail, a wheel, some rigging, and skull-and-crossbones flag, does boast a plank off which several unfortunate pirates as well as Captain Hook throw themselves into the drink.

The biggest technical challenge of "Peter Pan," of course, is the flying. Not only Peter, but also the



PHOTO / PAUL LYDEN, KEVEN LAWSON

**Cathy Rigby as Peter Pan, having his shadow sewn back on by Wendy Darling, played by Elisa Sagardia, at the North Shore Music Theatre.**

## PETER PAN

Musical based on a play by Sir James Barrie

*Lyrics by Carolyn Leigh and Comden and Green; music by Moose Charlap and Jule Styne.*

*Alan Coats, director. Bruce Barnes, music director. Patti Colombo, choreography. Sets, John Iacovelli. Costumes, Shigeru Yaji. Lighting, Tom Sturge. Flying illusions, ZFX Inc. Sound, John A. Stone. At: North Shore Music Theatre, through Aug. 13*

three Darling children have to lift off several times during the show. An in-the-round theater makes this more difficult because there are no curtains or offstage wings to hide the flight apparatus. The North Shore production, with technical assistance from ZFX Inc., makes no effort to hide the cables that suspend the flyers. The hitching-up process by which flyers are attached and released from their harnesses is, however, camouflaged pretty effectively. However, none of that really matters because the flying, with characters soaring over

the audience, is so exhilarating.

Next to flight, the greatest challenge in any "Peter Pan" production is to find the right performer — traditionally a woman — to play Peter. Rigby, the former Olympic gymnast, may not have the voice of Mary Martin, but she has physical attributes that are just about perfect. Small, lithe, infinitely agile, and with a slightly wizened face, she is the embodiment of the mischievous, androgynous, ageless sprite. She tosses off cartwheels, flips, handstands, splits, and leaps — often while singing. She dances creditably and sings efficiently (if not always perfectly in tune). Most of all, she seems to love playing the part and to really believe in it. So we believe in her.

No one else in the cast offers so compelling a portrayal that Rigby is at risk of being upstaged — except perhaps by Steven Petrillo as an endearing, wiggly Nana and a wonderfully slithery Crocodile. As Captain Hook, David Masenheimer is decked out elegantly in laces and jeweled frock coat, curly wig, and

plumed hat. He plies a sword with grace. But his swagger and menace are generic and his singing voice is constricted and thin.

Wendy, John, and Michael Darling, played by Elisa Sagardia, Joseph Berardi Jr., and Stephen Schapero, are cute but unmemorable. Wendy, in particular, doesn't tug at your heartstrings. The Lost Boys are a funny, scruffy bunch; the Pirates are all "musicians" who

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ply their instruments with greater aplomb than their daggers. The Indians, with Yvette Tucker as Tiger Lily, are terrific dancers. Indeed, the now politically incorrect powwow, "Ugg-a-Wugg," proves a sensational, showstopping dance number complete with closely synchronized percussion effects.

Bruce Barnes keeps the performers and orchestra together, no small task of coordination. Sound engineer John A. Stone, however, might want to tweak the acoustic balances: Too often, Captain Hook's voice, which ought to be commanding, got lost in the ensemble, just as he was boasting about his despicable villainy.

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