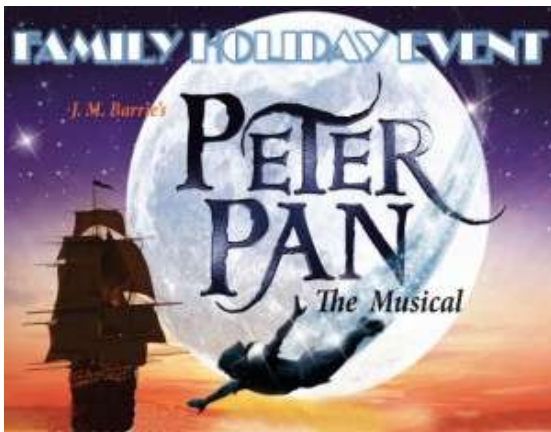




Musical Theatre News and information for schools, community and professional theaters

Filichia Features: Your PETER PAN LIVE!

by Peter Filichia on December 12, 2014 in [Filichia Features, Peter Pan \(1954 Bway Version\)](#)



PETER PAN AT CENTENARY STAGE

Whether you loved or loathed PETER PAN LIVE! on Dec. 4, you may well have been reminded of all the pleasures that the 1954 musical has to offer. As a result, you've decided to give the vintage musical a serious look toward producing it.

At Centenary Stage Company in Hackettstown, New Jersey, director-choreographer Michael Blevins has directed a grounded (and that's a compliment) production in which Lea Antolini-Lid plays a most convincing Peter.

Like Allison Williams, Antolini-Lid gives Peter a Cockney accent and plays the role in a masculine way. When this Peter picks up Wendy's dolls, he was rough with them. He has that restlessness found in young men, too, so when he's standing on a landing between two bannisters, he places his hands squarely on each, hoists himself and swings back and forth.

I guess I should say "she," "her hands" and "hoisted herself." But Antolini-Lid is so effective that masculine parts-of-speech must be used to describe, uh, her.

The one sequence that virtually demands that Peter be played by a female is "Oh, My Mysterious Lady," for it demands coloratura singing. (The song was specifically written for Mary Martin, the first Peter to play in this musical, for she had this ability.) Still, despite this, any actress taking on Peter Pan should be as mannish as possible. For all the adoration that has been heaped on Martin, I must agree with Mike Clark, the television critic for USA TODAY who said of the legend "This is a Peter who would get many playground beatings."

True. Remember that Peter is a leader of boys – although this latest TV broadcast has been roundly criticized for making Peter the leader of MEN. Indeed, the Lost "Boys" were portrayed by actors who had lost their boyishness some years ago. If you do the musical, you'll be better off casting young, even if you are forced to deal with child wranglers, childish diseases and childish stage parents.

Another way to establish masculinity is to avoid putting Peter in green tights, which Martin wore. Men, after all, haven't sported such glorified pantyhose for centuries. Costume designer Julia Sharp made a wise decision by giving Peter plain ol' pants that look as roughed up as they'd be in Neverland, where nary a dry cleaning establishment is ever shown us. The patched vest jacket that Antolini-Lid sports is appropriately distressed, too.

On TV, Christopher Walken received some criticism for seeming listless, but even here I preferred a world-weary pirate to the campfest that Cyril Ritchard played with Martin. If I have misgivings of Martin's being a leader of boys, I certainly have more about Ritchard's being the leader of men. Consider directing your Hook as a tough guy; at Centenary, Osborn Focht is.

Am I being too literal for what is literally a fairy tale? That's a good rebuttal, but we do live in a more literal age than the one James M. Barrie inhabited more than a century ago. Even this musical dates back to the early years of the first Eisenhower administration. Yes, you can do the 60-year-old show in fanciful fashion, as it has been played for decades, but even a show that has flying in it can allow for some earthbound scenes.



PETER PAN was constructed as a three-act musical, for those stagehands need time to change the Act One Darling home into Act Two Neverland. If you fear that two intermissions will make for a too-long evening that will keep young kids from their usual bedtimes, consider Blevins' solution. He brings down a scrim of Neverland and in-one has the Pirates chase The Lost Boys. Don't resist the opportunity to plant a puppet parrot on one pirate's shoulder.

Blevins does not bring out Captain Hook here, but saves him for a later major entrance. What he does include in this in-one, however, is the enormous crocodile that chases everyone off-stage. A game Ernest Scarborough is clad from snout to tail in a leatherette costume. Lest Scarborough burn his belly while sliding on the floor, Blevins positions him atop a long skateboard, which allows the actor to zip across the stage much faster, too.

When directors consider staging **PETER PAN**, they often worry about the dangers involved in flying. Duly noted, but pay attention to some other potential minor menaces. Be careful of those swords with which Michael and John fight. You don't want any trips to the emergency room. The swords could be cardboard because kids — especially in those days — didn't have access to a Home Depot.

Remind Wendy, Michael and John to shut their eyes tight before Peter spreads that fairy dust on them. We don't want to see kids distracted from flying because they're busy rubbing their eyes in hopes of ridding them of offending specks.

Make certain that no one is in the wings when The Lost Boy known as Curley shoots the arrow off-stage in order to kill Wendy. When rehearsing this scene, don't hesitate to point out to the cast that after Peter demands to know who killed Wendy, Curley immediately owns up to it. Moral of the story: if you do something wrong, admit it right away. Lying must never be an option.

The script asks that Peter and the Lost Boys build a house for Wendy, but that needn't be as demanding as it sounds. Blevins simply brings on upright dressing screens and tops them off with an enormous umbrella. Presto, house-oh!

Rob Ashford and Glenn Weiss, the directors of the NBC broadcast, opted for a genuine dog. Nana, said to be the children's nurse, is traditionally played by a person in an enormous St. Bernard Dog costume. You can of course go with a real dog, but Nana is a good starter role for a shy kid who's a bit afraid to be on stage. Cast a human being as Nana, and you may very well find that that stage-frightened child will lose those fears thanks to a large and protective furry costume. Next time out after this stage experience, he may well be ready to show his face to, if not the world, then a sizable audience.

Creating a Tinker Bell is easier in these days of laser beams and power point presentations. Blevins anticipated what the TV broadcast used: a green light that turned other colors to reflect Tinker Bell's ever-changing emotions.

Tinker Bell's travels have been traditionally accompanied by a xylophonist. Don't have one on hand? A guitarist will do, playing the notes on the seventh position or higher.

While **PETER PAN** will appeal most to children, it does offer adults one genuine belly laugh. Wendy (the excellent autocrat-in-training Nikki Miller) flies back home with a bevy of Lost Boys and asks her parents "Won't you adopt them?" And they say yes. (Well, not that many boys went to college in those days, so tuition at least won't be a costly issue.)

By the way, isn't it interesting that one of Peter's motivations for returning to the Darling home is his wanting to hear the ending of the story he'd begun to overhear on his previous visit? Yes, people will go out of their way to get good art. Here's hoping that you can give it to them with your **PETER PAN**.



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