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Friday, October 1, 2004

**'Peter Pan'**

Review: Cathy Rigby shines in the new national tour in its first stop at the La Mirada performing arts theater.

By **ERIC MARCHESE**

Special to the Register

You'd think that after essaying the title role of "Peter Pan" for the umpteenth time, Cathy Rigby would have tired of it all. Watching Rigby, though, in the current incarnation of the lively 1954 musical only indicates her commitment to perfecting her performance as the impish, eternally youthful little boy who can fly.

Rigby has already done the role on Broadway, with the 1990-91 touring show, the 1998 revival and in an A&E special that won an Emmy Award. Cementing her image as Peter Pan is the current staging at the La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts. The all-new co-production by McCoy Rigby Entertainment, the Nederlander Organization and La Mirada Theatre, in association with Albert Nocciolino, Larry Payton, J. Lynn Singleton and Craig Barna, starts in La Mirada, then takes to the road for the next 18 months.

The tour is Rigby's swan song in the role, the actress having vowed to hang up her tights and pixie dust when the production closes in early 2006. That means locals had better hotfoot it over to the La Mirada venue for a peek at this elaborately crafted show designed, despite its kid-oriented nature, to appeal to all ages. There's plenty of sly humor and skilled dancing for adults and gobs of sweet-natured innocence for the kids.

Director Glenn Casale and a mammoth production team have tweaked the original - the Jerome Robbins musicalization of Sir James Barrie's 1904 stage play based on his 1902 novel "The Little White Bird," with music by Moose Charlap and Jule Styne and lyrics by Carolyn Leigh, Betty Comden and Adolph Green. With John Iacovelli's eye-popping sets, Shigeru Yaji's fanciful costumes, Tom Ruzika's moody lighting, Julie Ferrin's sound schema and Paul Rubin's flying design - part of ZFX Inc. - the visuals and special effects take center stage.

Nonetheless, it's Rigby, agile and irresistible as Peter, that is the production's raison d'être. Within seconds of taking the stage, she burnishes the illusion of a

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**LIGHTER THAN AIR:** Cathy Rigby takes to the skies one last time as "Peter Pan" in the La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts production and an upcoming national tour.

**'PETER PAN'**

**Where** La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts, 14900 La Mirada Blvd., La Mirada

**When** Through Oct. 10. 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays-Thursdays, 8 p.m. Fridays, 2:30 and 8 p.m. Saturdays, 2:30 and 7 p.m. Sundays

**How much** \$32-\$40

**Length** 2 hours, 15 minutes

**Suitability** All ages

**Call** (714) 994-6310 or [www.lamiradattheatre.com](http://www.lamiradattheatre.com)

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hyperactive, cocky, self-sufficient little Cockney lad who refuses to let anyone make him deal with the solemn business of growing up. Barna has reorchestrated the score and written new vocal arrangements and dance music for a "Peter Pan" that looks and sounds like none of its predecessors. Their work couples with Casale's sure-handed direction and Patti Colombo's vibrant choreography for a "Peter Pan" that's all of a piece - a sentimental, joyous celebration of childhood.

The story, of course, brings Peter into the nursery of the Darlings' home in London circa 1902. Peter insists that young Wendy Darling (Elisa Sagardia) would make a perfect mother to the lost boys he presides over at his idyllic home, Neverland. Peter whisks Wendy and younger brothers John and Michael to Neverland, where they encounter a band of Indians and - more ominously - Captain Hook (Howard McGillin), who leads a pirate ship in search of his nemesis, Peter.

Rigby brings much more than her agile antics and skill in the flying scenes: Her vocal skills are considerable, whether singing solo on the tender "Neverland" or providing the lower-register countermelodies for Sagardia in the wistful waltz song "Distant Melody."

McGillin handles the dual roles of Mr. Darling and Captain Hook with panache, testy and thin-skinned as the unappreciated Mr. D., florid and deliciously hammy as the leader of a comically inept shiplod of buccaneers. Colombo shows her choreographic chops in two songs: "Indians" is a lively, exotic dance number led by the lithe Dana Solimando as Tiger Lily; "Ugg-a-Wugg" is now an elongated, involved dance scene enlivened by a savage energy and an inventive use of drumsticks. It's the kind of scene that can only be done with adult professional dancers in roles normally cast - as on the community level - with children.

The show's versatile, all-singing/all-dancing chorus is, in fact, one of its strengths. Barna and his orchestra have a light, deft touch with the score for a tightly paced, expertly staged evening dedicated to the freedom and joys of youth.

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Freelance writer Eric Marchese has covered entertainment for the Register since 1984.

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