

October 01, 2004
 Los Angeles, CA

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Article Published: Thursday, September 30, 2004 - 7:09:22 AM PST

Cathy Rigby simply ageless as 'Peter Pan'

 By **Evan Henerson**
 Theater Critic

Cathy Rigby is Peter Pan.

Oh sure, it's ad-blurb rhetoric. It's also true. In the 50 years since Moose Charlap and Carolyn Leigh unleashed their musical adaptation of J.M. Barrie's tale on unsuspecting children (and their parents), nobody has hooked on the pulleys more times or sprinkled more magic dust over more stages than Rigby. Love or hate the show, whether or not you believe in fairies, the pixie-ish former Olympic gymnast is and always will be the boy who refuses to grow up.

But not to hang it up, apparently. The current tour of "Peter Pan," which launched at the La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts, is courtesy of Rigby and her producer/husband, Tom McCoy, who also runs that theater. After La Mirada, Pan, Hook and the Lost Boys hit the road, alighting in November at the Pantages Theatre and likely ending up back on Broadway. After which, if you believe the ads, Rigby will stash her sword and hang up her green tights for good.



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For the time being, however, she's as petulant, nimble and - of course - airborne as ever. A new generation of children - many of whom weren't even born when Rigby first performed the role - will now get to boo the pirates, cheer the Lost Boys, resuscitate poisoned Tinkerbell and dream of winging it to Neverland along with John, Michael and Wendy Darling.

There is still plenty of magic. Rigby may be the high-flying headliner, but director Glen Casale makes sure she is capably surrounded.

First and most critically is the casting of Broadway veteran Howard McGillin, who brings an

effete and limber grace to Capt. Hook (and doubles as the Darling patriarch). How ripe the role is for scenery chewing and how wonderfully unblustery is McGillin, who positively dwarfs Rigby during their scenes together. Patrick Richwood's cuddly Mr. Smee, Hook's right-hand (right-hook?) man reaps the appropriate yuks and moves well.

In fact, everybody does. Whether it's the pirates tango-ing or attempting a tarantella, or Peter, Tiger Lily (played by Dana Solimando) and the Indians drumming up a frenzy in the "Ugg-a-Wugg" number, choreographer Patti Colombo has the ensemble looking polished and energetic. Paul Rubin handles the flight design choreography, which, as Rigby demonstrates, appears to involve considerably more than attaching oneself to invisible wires and swinging back and forth.

Exciting though that is to watch, Rigby does much of her best work on the ground. Her



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Pan is still rough and tumble, disarmingly uncouth, amazingly light on his feet and - despite the obvious charms of Solimando and Elisa Sagardia's Wendy - utterly sexless. The boy looks to be everybody's friend and nobody's parent. All he wants to do is crow, fly and live it up. When he doesn't get his way, Pan pouts. Which is boyish, too.

Rigby's program biography charmingly notes that the actress is related to several members of the current "Peter Pan" company. Two of her children are in the cast, as well as her daughter-in-law and nephew, and she has family ties to people in props and the concessions stand.

Given how much of a family industry this "Peter Pan" is and how well the McCoy/Rigby team seems to know its audience, it was rather jaw-dropping that Tom McCoy would use his precurtain welcome at Saturday's opening night - when the audience contained many children - to make off-color jokes about sex on the road and Viagra. On an otherwise delightful family evening, the show's producer deserved a hook. And we ain't talkin' one supplied by the good captain.

PETER PAN

Our rating: ★★★★★

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

When: 7:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, 8 p.m. Friday, 2:30 and 8 p.m. Saturday, 2:30 and 7 p.m. Sunday; through Oct. 10.

Tickets: \$32 to \$40. Call (562) 944-9801.

In a nutshell: Cathy Rigby is still airborne after all these years.

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