

Neverland goes to India

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by MARY CUSACK



MSU's 'Peter Pan' flies high in inventive reimaging

It is not possible to crow too loudly about MSU's production of "Peter Pan," especially as Peter himself insists the audience do so during his showstopping number, "I Gotta Crow." The MSU Review Department of Theatre has maximized every inch of the Pasant Theatre to create a truly spectacular fantasy with amazing production values.

Director Rob Roznowski made bold and creative choices. The first was to set the story in colonial India, which allowed Roznowski to tap experts from across MSU, including English Professor Jyotsna Singh as the historical consultant.

All of the production choices were based around this setting. The tribe of Indians truly are Indian, portrayed by the MSU Bhangra Dance Team. The dances performed by Peter and the Lost Boys are heavily influenced by classical Indian dance movements.

"Peter Pan"

MSU Department of Theatre The Pasant Theatre, Wharton Center 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 16 & Thursday, April 17; 8 p.m. Friday, April 18 & Saturday, April 19; 2 p.m. Saturday, April 19 & Sunday, April 20 \$20/\$18 seniors and faculty/\$15 students/\$8 children (800) WHARTON, whartoncenter.com

Kirk Domer's versatile set is an Indian bazaar, and traditional Indian shadow puppets are used to mimic the action, enhance the fantastical setting and stand in for animals. Spoiler alert: There is not a real crocodile in the cast.

Perhaps the one aspect about the Peter Pan story that touches all human beings is the flying. Who doesn't want to fly by simply thinking of good things? The professional flying rigging would be a distraction if the actors didn't move naturally in them. The cast appears joyful when flying, particularly lead Joshua Whitson, who has mastered the art. He flits, flips and fights like a natural, often while singing, and doesn't miss a beat.

Whitson has a Martin Short vibe about him, which makes sense since Short still looks like a man who never grew up. Jacqueline Wheeler has great fun in her role as Captain Hook. Another of Roznowski's creative choices, he made Captain Hook and the pirates female. Unfortunately, some of Wheeler's dialogue gets muddled when Hook is in full-shriek mode.

The "Peter Pan" experience is completely immersive. When the doors open, Peter and the Lost Boys are on stage and walking the aisles, inviting children to come to the stage to play games. During the play characters enter and exit through the audience, and Peter flies into the audience frequently. Following the play, the cast is in the lobby, meeting and greeting star-struck children.

The play is mesmerizing for children and engaging for adults. There had to have been more than one set of eyes welling up as Peter tells an adult Wendy that she can't fly anymore because she is too old. This quiet reminder of the cost of growing up may be lost on the kids, but not on the adults.

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