

Department of Theatre's *Peter Pan Flies to India For Inspiration*



The MSU Department of Theatre's 2014 production of the beloved musical *Peter Pan* offered a new twist on the classic high-flying fantasy about the young boy who won't grow up.

Directed by Rob Roznowski, and a collaboration with the MSU Bhangra team, the production not only recreated Barrie's familiar plot, but also took its audience through a stimulating, perhaps surprising, cross-cultural journey.

Because Barrie's original image of Indians, as well as the musical's depiction of them as "redskins" who "smokum peace pipe," has been deemed racist, or, at the very least, culturally insensitive, the decision was made to set this production in colonial India at the turn of the century. After all, in 1902, the year J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* was published, the British Empire—or the Raj—was firmly entrenched in India.

Thus, in the DOT's production, Mr. and Mrs. Darling were characterized as representatives of the empire, since British soldiers and their families were often posted to India. Peter and the "lost boys" were reminiscent of Kipling's *Kim*, representing Anglo-Indian racially mixed children.

And, by the nineteenth century, young English women were arriving in India in large numbers, and being labeled, perhaps humorously, "the fishing fleet." In the department's production of culturally mutating realities, the girls of the "fishing fleet" transformed into the familiar pirates of the story.



EVOKING SIGHTS, SOUNDS

As a result, the stage became a richly fluid contact zone of intermingling cultures, sounds, sights, identities, and temporalities. MSU's *Peter Pan* cast a long look at empire, while also evoking the rich sights and sounds of postcolonial India—bazaars, costumes, and Bhangra (Punjabi folk) dance, performed by the MSU Bhangra team.

As noted in the program for *Peter Pan*, "Theatre is an art form that captures human experience not as static and ideological, but rather as playful, improvisational, and fluid, crossing cultural, social and sexual boundaries."

The MSU Department of Theatre's production of *Peter Pan* brought to life a Neverland that laid out a richly evocative experience of multiple worlds, spanning the British Empire and beyond!