

# arts monday



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“Peter Pan,” as presented by threesixty° entertainment, is more J.M. Barrie’s original story and less the Disney version of the boy who never wanted to grow up.

## Captivating wonder of ‘Peter Pan’ hooks all ages

By Terry Byrne  
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The familiar tale of the boy who wouldn’t grow up gets a thrilling new production in threesixty° entertainment’s tent, playing in City Hall Plaza through Dec. 30. This London-based production company’s approach lives up to its name, creating a theatrical experience that surrounds the audience so completely it feels as if we are flying, right along with Peter Pan and the Darling children.

The dramatic illusion is created by the computer-generated images projected above the audience. Since we’re seated in a circle, with the performers on an arena stage, the effect of the 360-degree projections is truly jaw-dropping, particularly when the Darling children (Wendy, Michael, and John) follow Peter Pan to his home in Neverland,

and we have the sensation that we’re flying over London, past recognizable sights such as Albert Hall and the statue of Lord Nelson in Trafalgar Square, as well as through clouds and starry night sky. Once in Neverland, the images shift to a jungle canopy for the home of the Lost Boys and the deck of a ship for the scenes with Captain Hook and his band of pirates.

Flying is, of course, a required special effect in any production of “Peter Pan.” But instead of the usual single harness, which allows performers to fly across the stage, threesixty° uses dual lines, which allow the performers, particularly Peter (the wonderfully childlike Chuck Bradley) and the feisty Tinker Bell (Emily Yetter) to flip, tip, spin, and hang upside down above their unsuspecting friends and foes. This also means the performers have to be particularly agile, and

### STAGE REVIEW

#### PETER PAN

Play, adapted by Tanya Ronder from the book by J.M. Barrie. Directed by Ben Harrison.

Set, costume, and 3-D projecting design, William Dudley. Original music, Benjamin Wallfisch. Choreography, Fleur Darkin. Sound, Gregory Clarke. Lighting, Mark Henderson. Fight direction, Nicholas Hall. Puppetry design, Sue Buckmaster. Illusions, Paul Kieve. Presented by threesixty° entertainment  
At: threesixty° Theatre, City Hall Plaza through Dec. 30. Tickets: \$35-\$75. 888-772-6849, www.peterpantheshow.com/boston

everyone in this ensemble seems as comfortable with gymnastic and acrobatic skills as they are with acting.

What makes this “Peter Pan” particularly enchanting is the mix of the high-tech scenic pieces with low-tech puppetry, clever choreography, and impressive fight direction. Nana, the Darling children’s vigilant nurse, is a shaggy bit of material, operated by puppeteer Joshua Holden, who returns in Neverland to manage an ostrich as well as the delightfully terrifying Crocodile.

My 5-year-old companions were familiar with Disney’s animated version, and reassured me that if I missed anything, they could explain. But adapter Tanya Ronder avoids Disney’s smoothed-out approach, playing some of darker notes in J.M.

Barrie’s original story. In one sequence, we go underwater and

feel the terror of the mermaids who try to drown Michael. Josh Swales gives Captain Hook a particularly merciless swagger in contrast to his hapless Mr. Darling. Tiger Lily’s (Heidi Buehler) dance of gratitude is quite suggestive, and the jealous competition for Peter’s affections among Tiger Lily, Wendy (Evelyn Hoskins), and Tinker Bell is made abundantly clear. In fact, although “Peter Pan” is a story for children, Ronder has found lots of moments that appeal to older children (dare I say adults?) as well.

This “Peter Pan” is a wonderfully immersive experience that taps into the complex world of children’s imaginations, which Barrie described as places full of dark holes as well as brilliant splashes of color.

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