

“Peter Pan is Still Fly”

Peter Pan still flies thanks to Director Lillian White and the Burning Coal Theatre Company's *Peter Pan and Wendy*. I enjoyed White's unique spin on this classic with grown-up Wendy (Shawn Morgenlander) telling a bedtime story to daughter Jane (Mary Lynn Bain) of Wendy's childhood sojourn to Neverland with Peter Pan (Hugo Beckett). Casting Julie Oliver, who played a convincing villainous female Captain Hook, was another fresh take.

The Burning Coal Company's enjoyment of performing together radiates throughout the production from Peter's plucky pursuit of his shadow (Bain), to Peter and Wendy's kiss and thimble scene, to the climatic final battle between Pan and Hook. Their dynamic synergy offsets the limited stage size for flying scenes and weaves the story from beginning to end. Memorial Hall's stage appeared too cozy and spartan to showcase the boundless energy and athleticism of Becket, Montgomery and crew. I credit the crew for efficiently using every last inch of the stage including ladders sharing roles as beds and pirate ship planks.

Christiana Rose's sound and composition brilliantly captures the joy of flying and our imagination. The music had me thinking happy thoughts and that maybe I could fly with Peter and Wendy. Peter's plea to the audience to clap their hands to resuscitate the poisoned Tinker Bell seemed organic to the plot and was the necessary bridge to climatic battle on Hook's ship.

Hook's monologue leading into a final battle with Peter was filled with a range of emotions. I was captivated as her reminiscing reminded me of another fictional captain, Ahab, suddenly rationalizing if the relentless pursuit of ultimate victory was worth the sacrifices required in an escalation of commitment. Hook's pre-fight words guided us to my takeaway of the production's theme.

I believe White succeeded in making us realize that in the end, each of us to grow up and surrender the joys of youth. We have to move forward and chart new adventures as even Peter's memory fades from lack of growth. He no longer, or refuses to recognize, the mother Wendy. Peter stubbornly remained a boy forever, never growing, never experiencing adult life. He whimsically thought his kiss and thimble saved Wendy's life from an errant arrow. What saved Wendy, what saves us all is living and experiencing a life. White and the Burning Coal Theatre Company were equally brilliant as actors, teachers, and storyteller demonstrating that Peter's heartbreak is not that Wendy grew up. It's that he never did. I enjoyed *Peter Pan and Wendy* from opening act to the final scene. I trust I was not alone in my thoughts Friday night.

Peter Pan and Wendy was presented by the BorderLight International Theatre + Fringe Festival onstage at the Memorial Hall at Old Stone Church Friday (Cleveland, Ohio) from July 26 – 27, 2019.

Review by Ryan Cina
July 26, 2019