

Artpark's 'Peter Pan' is a joyous journey



John Bolton as Captain Hook and Hayley Podschun as Peter Pan delight Artpark crowds.

By Hannah Gordon

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With a little faith, trust and pixie dust, “Peter Pan” stole my heart.

The musical opened at Artpark on Thursday night to a crowd of children of all ages – some in wheelchairs and others clutching their mother’s legs.

The show began with a peek into the Darling home, where three children – Wendy, Michael and John – live. They played pirates and told stories of Peter Pan. It was cute, but the show didn’t take off until Peter Pan, played by Hayley Podschun, sprung through the children’s nursery window sprinkling silver pixie dust as he flew. A smile spread across my face, and it didn’t leave until the curtains closed.

Podschun brought to life the boyish wonder and playfulness Peter Pan embodies. By the fourth song of Act I, “I’m Flying,” the audience really gets to see Peter’s flying capability as he bounds from wall to wall of the nursery doing flips and jumps.

After Wendy, Michael, John, Tinkerbell and Peter leave for Neverland, Captain Hook and his crew take the stage. The bumbling pirates sang and marched their way from the audience to the stage to welcome their captain into the spotlight, but ended up humorously and purposefully facing the wrong way.

Enter the sarcastic Hook. Members of the audience boo – and the fourth wall is broken. Hook answers the audience with a glare and, “Oh, grow up.” It’s impossible not to laugh. “Peter Pan” repeatedly breaks the fourth wall, mostly for humor, but the last time it happens, it’s heartwarming. I won’t spoil it, but I’m a sap and adore the tale of Peter Pan, so I nearly cried.

By the end of the first act, it appeared Hook, played by Western New York native John Bolton, and his sidekick Smee, played by Jared Loftin, would steal the show. Not that the actors playing Peter Pan, Wendy, Tiger Lily and all the rest weren’t great, but Hook and Smee had hilarious interaction: Smee danced, Hook hit him and so on.

However, throughout the second act, it was clear not one or two actors could completely steal the show for “Peter Pan.” It was as if the characters were saying, “Hope you didn’t laugh too hard at the pirates, because the Lost Boys are going to do even better.” And in the next scene the pirates would command the stage again. It was a great give-and-take from all involved.

Local talent added to the fun. The Lost Boys included Colin Atkins, an 11-year-old who dances for Time to Dance in Niagara Falls; Thomas Evans, a junior at St. Joseph’s Collegiate Institute; Joe Greenan, a junior at West Seneca East High School; and Sean Ryan, a senior at the University at Buffalo. Other local nods included some of the Indians and pirates, as well as the crocodile, played by Nathan Roberts, a junior at West Seneca West High School, who made the audience laugh without saying a single line or even showing his face.

This show proves – no matter what Peter Pan says – that it’s never too late to go to Neverland. The magic of “Peter Pan” didn’t even break when I was home in bed, dreaming of sword fights, pixies and Neverland – trust me, you will be, too.

THEATER REVIEW

“Peter Pan”

3.5 stars (out of four)

Through Friday at Artpark, Lewiston.

Tickets: \$25 to \$55 adults with child, senior and group discounts.

Info: artpark.net