

SOPHIE BLADES AS SMEE AND KORY WEIMER AS BLACK STACHE IN *PETER AND THE STARCATCHER*



PHOTO BY EMILY BLY

PETER AND THE STARCATCHER

Finding the real Neverland in an energetic show at Cottage Theatre

Before there ever lived a boy named Peter Pan, before there existed a place called Neverland, a girl named Molly adventured with three orphan boys on a remote island inhabited by a tribe called, improbably, the Mollusks. One of the boys would

go on to be named Peter, and would never grow up, and Molly's daughter, Wendy ... Well, that's for another story entirely.

That is the conceit behind *Peter and the Starcatcher*, a short-running 2012 Broadway show based on a prequel

novel to the much better known tale of *Peter Pan*, as told in play and novel form by J.M. Barrie.

Directed by Tony Rust, *Peter and the Starcatcher* opened Friday at Cottage Theatre to kick off the community theater's 35th season.

The largely young and entirely energetic cast is clearly having a great time in this show, which is done ensemble style — the ensemble often functioning as a Greek chorus to keep the audience apprised of the nearly Shakespearean plot, with ships at sea and storms and mermaids and exotic, magical places — on an open and highly adaptable set designed, as usual in Rust's shows, by Rust himself.

Peter and the Starcatcher was written by Rick Elice, based on a novel by Ridley Pearson and Dave Barry (yes, that Dave Barry), and as such contains a lot of sharply witty dialogue. Sadly, much of it got lost in the intensity of the show as the young players vied for who could be louder and faster, sometimes leaving the audience out of the joke.

But Sheldon Hall, a veteran of Actors Cabaret of Eugene making his debut at Cottage Theatre, is sweetly charming as the Boy (soon to be named Peter) and plays well against Stephani Anderson's solid Molly Aster.

Some great comic turns come from Keith Kessler, as Mrs. Bumbrake, who has her heart set on the sailor Alf (Dale Flynn).

But the strongest comic performance by far came from Kory Weimer, a Cottage Theatre regular (*Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Much Ado About Nothing*) as the foppishly clever pirate Black Stache.

Costumes, by Rhonda Turnquist, perfectly capture the period and spirit of the play. Live music added to the show's high energy; Keri Davis was music director and played keyboard, with percussion by Matthew Goes.

Peter and the Starcatcher runs through Feb. 19 at Cottage Theatre in Cottage Grove. Tickets \$25 Adult / \$15 Youth (6-18). More info at CottageTheatre.org.



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