

Film Review: Orphan Abducted to Neverland in 'Pan'

By Kam Williams
Special To *The Skanner*
News

Everyone's familiar with Peter Pan, the much-beloved children's classic revolving around the magical adventures of a little boy who can fly and won't grow up. In fact, the fanciful character is so deeply woven into the cultural fabric that he has a psychological disorder, the Peter Pan syndrome, named after him, a pathology applied to people seemingly stuck in a state of suspended adolescence.

Created by Sir James Matthew Barrie, Peter Pan was first produced as a play in 1904 and adapted into an illustrated novel seven years thereafter. The enchanting

fairy tale made its screen debut as a silent movie in 1924, with assorted remakes, sequels, spin-offs and animated versions being released over the ensuing generations.

Directed by Joe Wright (Anna Karenina), *Pan*, the latest incarnation, is a prequel very loosely based on the J.M. Barrie plotline. This special f/x spectacular is the brainchild of actor-turned-scriptwriter Jason Fuchs, who ostensibly felt free to speculate wildly about Peter Pan's roots. The film stars Levi Miller as Peter, and features an impressive supporting cast including Hugh Jackman, Rooney Mara, Garrett Hedlund and Amanda Seyfried.

At the picture's point of departure, we witness a



'Pan'

newborn baby being very reluctantly deposited by his mother (Seyfried) on the doorstep of the Lambeth Home for Boys, an orphanage run by an order of nuns. Fast-forward a dozen years

and we find Peter and his fellow foundlings sharing the misfortune of being under the thumb of a sadistic mother superior (Kathy Burke).

Furthermore, it's the height of the Battle of Britain, and the Luftwaffe's daily fire bombings of London during the Blitz have left the lads terribly traumatized. Obviously, Fuchs' anachronistic screenplay takes a few liberties, such as in setting the story during World War II, well after the source material was already written. Nevertheless, the tale

makes an incredible leap from reality into fantasy the night a flying frigate swoops out of the sky and starts plucking the kids right out of their beds and up into the heavens. Curiously, the ship's captain is not Hook (Hedlund), but Blackbeard (Jackman), the notorious British pirate who roamed the high seas in the early 18th Century.

Unfortunately, Blackbeard is no savior but a kidnapper intent on enslaving the youngsters in Neverland, a lair located in another dimension. However,

here, Hook happens to be a benign figure who befriends Peter, along with Indian princess Tiger Lily (Mara) and the ethereal fairy Tinker Bell.

At this juncture, the movie morphs into an overstimulating, kitchen sink extravaganza serving up everything from dazzling, CGI chase scenes to catchy song-and-dance tunes (ala "Smells Like Teen Spirit") to swash-buckling derring-do. A riveting roller coaster ride well-designed to enthrall tykes for two hours straight.

Very Good ★★★
Rated PG for mature themes, mild epithets, action and violence
Running time: 111 minutes
Distributor: Warner Brothers Pictures



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Film Review: 'In My Father's House' Chronicles Grammy-Winning Rapper's Reunion with Long-Lost Dad



Brian Tillman with his son Che "Rhymefest" Smith

By Kam Williams
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Che "Rhymefest" Smith is among the handful of rappers who have actually managed to make it in the music industry. What's even more remarkable is the fact that the Grammy-winning artist also overcame a challenging childhood, having been raised on the rough South Side of Chicago by a single-mom who'd given birth to him while still in her early teens.

Despite his phenomenal success in the music business, one thing that nagged at Rhymefest was why he'd been abandoned by his father, Brian, a man he'd only seen a few times in his entire life, and not at all over the past two decades. He wondered whether his dad ever cared or thought about him — or might he be dead?

Rhymefest's curiosity was probably piqued because of the guilt he himself felt about having three out-of-wedlock offspring with baby-mamas he'd never committed to. He wanted to understand why he'd perpetuated the cycle of parental neglect, especially since fatherless kids represent 60 percent of youth suicides, 71 percent of juvenile incarcerations and 90 percent of homeless children.

So, first, he proceeded to buy the house that his father grew up in and moved in with his wife, Donnie. Then, after hearing rumors that Brian was a local hobo

and an alcoholic, he started scouring the streets of the Windy City for him.

Yes, he did search for and get his dad into rehab right after their tearful reunion. But would the lush find the strength to keep his nose clean with the help of this new lease on life coming in the form of a job, an apartment, and a loving, supportive son?

That is the tension that tugs at your heart while watching *In My Father's House*, a Prodigal Dad documentary co-directed by Ricki Stern and Anne Sundberg. The picture proves to be very compelling as a sociological examination of profound dysfunction, but it's simultaneously a bitter disappointment for anyone expecting a miraculous, happy Hollywood ending.

Unfortunately, Rhymefest just can't get no satisfaction from the father he's craved and loved from afar for as long as he can remember. But at least he continues to flourish professionally, having recently co-written the 2015 Oscar-winning Best Song "Glory" with Common and John Legend for the film *Selma*.

The movie's message, if any? If you're a successful rap star, you might want to think twice before returning to the ghetto to track down the deadbeat dad you never knew.

Excellent ★★★★★
Rated R for profanity and ethnic slurs
Running time: 93 minutes
Distributor: Arc Entertainment

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