

Show and Tell: 'Finding Neverland' at the Paramount - ParentMap

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“Life is too important to take seriously”



The cast of *Finding Neverland*. Photo credit: Carol Rosegg

It's hard to imagine a time before *Peter Pan*. Today the story seems as timeless as any other fairy tale, but Peter Pan was invented by a London playwright in the early 20th century. *Finding Neverland*, playing at Seattle's Paramount Theatre through Sunday, tells the story of the friendship that led J.M. Barrie to create Peter Pan. Through imaginative play, Barrie helps a young family overcome grief after their father's death, and in the process, finds the courage to become a true artist by writing *Peter Pan*, the play that changed theater. Based on the 2004 movie of the same name, *Finding Neverland* expands many small moments from the film into musical numbers.

Despite some of the darker aspects of the story, *Finding Neverland* keeps things light, playing for laughs more often than tears. Leads Kevin Kern as J.M. Barrie and Christine Dwyer as Sylvia Llewelyn Davies are kept busy hitting the high notes, leaving many of the best gags to the ensemble cast — notably, Dwelvan David and Matte Wolpe as self-important thespians cast in the <https://www.evernote.com/Home.action?login=true#ns=Clips&st=p&n=a0f88bd4-90c2-48c7-a337-c610ef0c0f80>

roles of Nanna the Dog and a toddler, respectively.

Barrie's servants are all funny voices and colorful eccentricities, evoking the silliness of Barrie's humor in the original *Peter Pan*. The quick-paced dialogue is perhaps more snappy than original, and its Freudian slips ("Toupee – I mean touché,") and wisecracks ("Do I believe in fairies? My dear boy, I work in theater") still earn laughs. The biggest laugh of the evening goes to the real-life dog playing Barrie's pet, Porthos, for sniffing the butt of the Nanna dog suit.

The production really shines in the physicality of the performances. As you would hope from a Peter Pan story, there is a flying wire, but it isn't used the way you expect it. During the more magical moments of flight, characters are supported by other actors, resulting in a beautiful visual that is also one of the play's most powerful metaphors. Barrie's terrified reaction to the arrival of Captain Hook had my daughter laughing out loud.

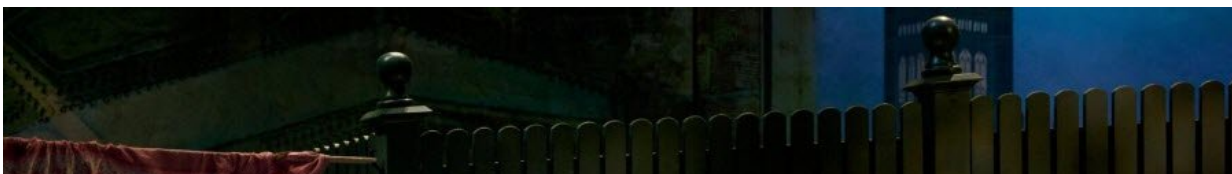


Kevin Kern as J.M. Barrie and Tom Hewitt as Captain Hook in the national tour of *Finding Neverland*

Similarly, stylized and exaggerated movement (like characters tossing their heads whenever exiting a scene) heightened the sense that everyone on stage is playing. In the song "Play," in which *Peter Pan* producer Frohman (a cross between Annie's Daddy Warbucks and O.J. Berman from *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, played by Tom Hewitt) reminds the *Peter Pan* actors that playing is their job. It's one of the most athletic and entertaining numbers in the production.

There is a lot of music in *Finding Neverland*, even for a Broadway musical. But while the choreography is energetic and imaginative, the lyrics, at times, could be more original and less repetitive. Unless you really love pop power ballads, you might find yourself wishing for a few more scenes without songs.

Connections to the story of Peter Pan are liberally strewn throughout the play, in ways that encourage children to connect the dots between events in *Finding Neverland* and those in Barrie's famous tale. Grown-ups can play this game, too. When Frohman complains that Barrie's new play doesn't even have a villain, he gesticulates with his cane, which casts a huge hooked shadow on the wall behind him, and Barrie's eyes go wide. It's one of the best moments in the play.





Mitchell Wray, Jordan Cole, Finn Faulconer and Ben Krieger as the Llewelyn Davies boys in the national tour of *Finding Neverland*

Parents should know

Despite a few gags tossed over the kids' heads to the parents, *Finding Neverland* is really for the kids (school-age and above). Director Diane Paulus has said that she made this play for her own children, and the child-centric focus comes through in the production.

Kids will especially love seeing the child actors perform. Six 10- to 12-year-old boys share the roles of the four Llewelyn Davies boys, with most of them taking on the role of more than one brother on different nights. The role of Peter, the brother who must learn to play again after his father's death, is especially challenging, with solo singing and some of the most emotionally charged scenes in the story. Notably, the boys perform the entire scene with the number "We're All Made of Stars" without a single adult on the stage.

While enjoyable, *Finding Neverland* may not rise from "want" to "need" in a family's tight budget. But if, like my daughter, your child has a collection of Peter Pan adaptations and spin-offs on her bookshelf and an iPod filled with pop music, then it might become a must-see.

There is nothing visually scary in this production, but aspects of the story could be disturbing for some children. J.M. Barrie gets divorced. At the beginning of the story, the Llewelyn Davies boys have recently lost their father, and in the second act their mother dies, too. These traumatic life events are integral to the story and are handled with sensitivity.

In 1903, the tomahawks and feathers of the red-skinned "piccaninny warriors" in J.M. Barrie's original play were uncontroversial, but *Finding Neverland* wisely shifts the focus from racist caricature to pirates and fairies. However, late in the second act, some of Frohman's actors perform in stereotypical Indian costumes, which may require some explanation from parents.

If you go...

Where: Paramount Theatre, 911 Pine St., Seattle, WA 98101

When: Showtimes for *Finding Neverland* are: Thursday, Jan. 12, 7:30 p.m.; Friday, Jan. 13 at 8 p.m.; Saturday, Jan. 14 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.; Sunday, Jan. 15, 1 p.m. (ASL/AVIA Interpreted) and 6:30 p.m. (open caption).

Tickets: Starting at \$35; [buy online](#).

Parking: Parking downtown can be challenging to find and expensive. Metered street parking is free after 8 pm and on Sundays if you can find a spot. Garages at The Grand Hyatt's Seventh and Pike Street Garage, The Washington State

Convention Center and in Pacific Place Mall can be expensive, but are more reliable.

Parent tips

- Run time is approximately two hours and 30 minutes, including one intermission.
- Recommended for ages 7 and older.
- There is relatively little rise between rows of seats in the historic Paramount, especially on the main floor, which makes it hard for children to see past people in front of them. A limited number of booster seats are available on the east side of the main floor, arrive early to make sure your child gets one.

Read a [study guide](#) for detailed information on the play.