

What was life like before Peter?

TCP, LMC team up for Pan prequel 'Peter and the Starcatcher'

By **JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO**
Sight & Sound Editor

BENTON HARBOR — “Peter and the Starcatcher” may rewrite a little bit of childhood lore.

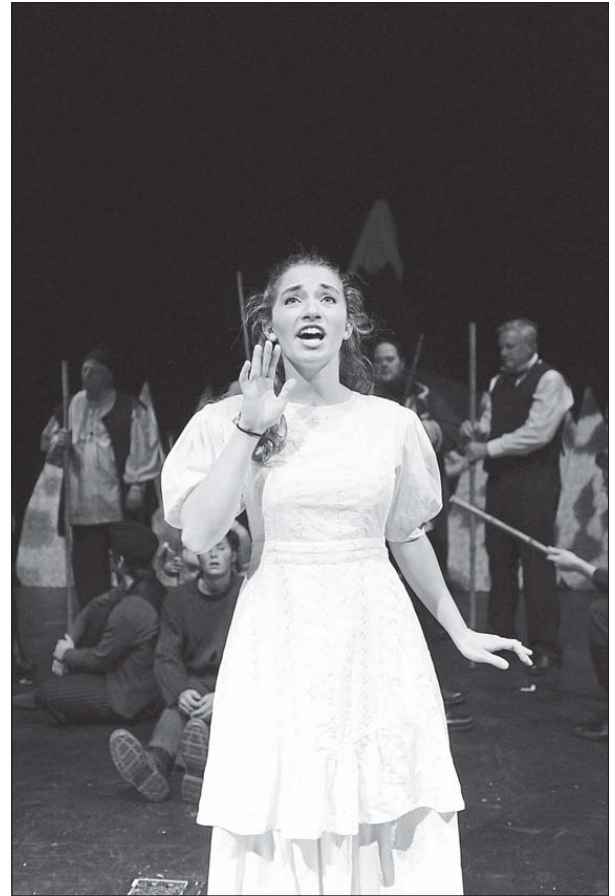
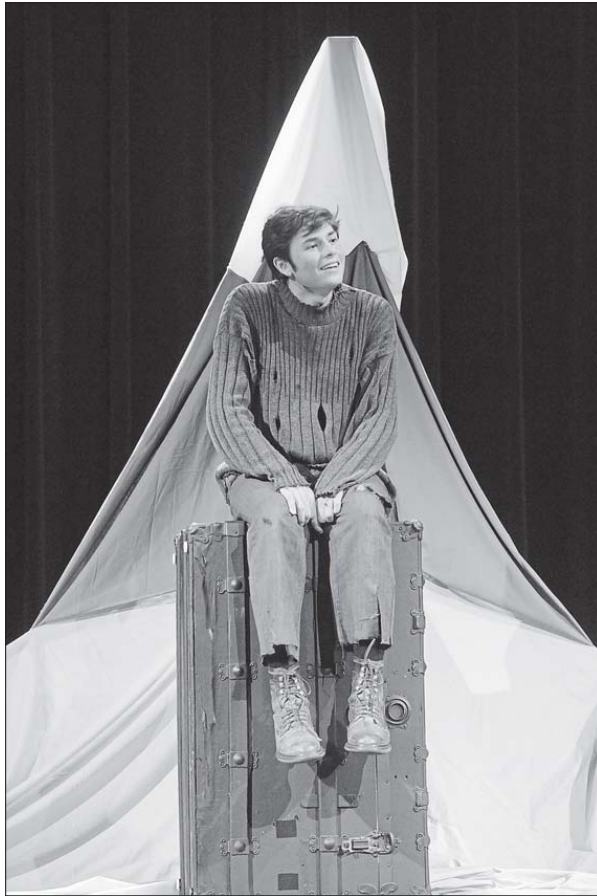
As it turns out, the adventure doesn’t actually begin with Wendy, John and Michael. Instead, it starts with a girl named Molly Aster and three orphan boys.

One of those boys has no name when the tale opens, but by the story’s end, we know that he’ll never grow up, he’ll lead a gang called the Lost Boys and he’ll battle Captain Hook. Of course, that’s all after he becomes Peter Pan.

“It’s a prequel to Peter Pan, and Molly Aster will eventually become Wendy’s mom,” says Lauren Kunkel, who plays Molly in “Peter and the Starcatcher,” which opens Friday in The Hanson Theater at Lake Michigan College. “She is a starcatcher, which means she catches the magical starstuff and tries to keep it away from people who would use it for bad things. She’s 13 years old and still a kid, but she really wants to be a leader. She wants to be like her dad, and is very spunky and confident.”

The same, however, can’t be said for the nameless boy who will become Peter Pan.

“He is very different than the Peter Pan that we all know – the courageous boy who never wants to grow up,” says Leo Carmody, who plays arguably literature’s most famous orphan in the play. “When the show opens he’s just this miserable orphan boy who doesn’t have a name. He’s a sad kid. It’s a side of him you don’t get to see, and



Leo Carmody (top left, and at left) stars as the boy/Peter in “Peter and the Starcatcher.” Lauren Kunkel (above) plays Molly Aster in the production, which opens at Lake Michigan College before moving to the Twin City Players Playhouse.

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The cast of "Peter and the Starcatcher" rehearse on Tuesday at Lake Michigan College.

you really see his growth in the play and how he leads up to the character we've all looked up to in our lives. It is definitely a show about growth and how people can change."

The production, directed by Paul Mow, is the first on-stage collaboration between Twin City Players and the Lake Michigan College Performing Arts Department. "Peter and the Starcatcher" will be staged in The Hanson Theater for three performances this weekend, then break for two weeks before reopening at the Twin City Players Playhouse in St. Joseph for nine more performances Dec. 2-18.

"LMC approached me about directing their fall play and I was already on the hook – pun intended – for 'Peter and the Starcatcher' for TCP," says Mow, who is also on TCP's board of directors. "I knew we would already be in rehearsals for this show so there was an opportunity to open it a few weeks early at LMC. I'm excited about this collaboration because I think it's important to have all these theater minds on the same page supporting each other in our community."

Adapted by Rick Elice from Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson's 2004 similarly named children's novel, "Peter and the Starcatchers," the play tells the story of 13-year-old Molly Aster, a Starcatcher Apprentice who is thrust into the company of pirates, a giant crocodile and angry mollusks as she and three orphan boys (Carmody, Jason Cope and Sam Johnson) attempt to return a trunk of precious starstuff to her father, Lord

Leonard Aster (Dave Wood).

The adventurers are pursued by a mustachioed pirate, Black Stache (Andrew Glisson), and his sidekick, Smeed (Aidan Diefenbach), and along the way, Molly learns what it means to grow up as she is reunited with her father.

But the orphans, however, will have nothing to do with maturity as they take up residence on an island where dreams are born and time stands still. It's on this island that the nameless orphan is christened Peter Pan.

The ensemble cast also includes Bailey Williams, Joel Smiedendorf, Susan Graham, Bill Klein, Paul Stortz, Ed Moore, Guy Miller and Nate Salvati.

"It's a tricky show because there is so much that goes on with stagecraft and magic," Mow says. "The 15 actors play about 100 different characters, so at any given time I would say that 13 of the 15 actors are constantly being engaged, whether they are bringing out an imaginary crocodile or pushing a boat into shape. It's constant movement. There really are no small parts here. It's a fun show that way."

The show also has some musical elements, although it isn't the typical 21st century Broadway musical.

"There are a couple of big songs and a few other musical moments but it's not what you might expect," Mow says. "The sound effects and the piano and percussion together feel like the accompaniment to a film rather than a musical. It almost reminds me of vaudeville or an old radio play in the way it uses these elements."

IF YOU GO

What: Twin City Players and Lake Michigan College present "Peter and the Starcatcher"

When: 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 3 p.m. Sunday

Where: Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Hanson Theater, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor

How much: \$15, \$10 for seniors and students, free for LMC students

Contact: 927-1221 or themendelcenter.com

When: 8 p.m. Dec. 2-3, 9-10, 16-17, and 2 p.m. Dec. 4, 11 and 18

Where: Twin City Players Playhouse, 600 W. Glenlord Road, St. Joseph

How much: \$15, \$12 for seniors, \$7 for children 12 and younger

Contact: 429-0400 or twincityplayers.org

There are also plenty of lighting, fog and other effects to create the otherworldly space in which these characters live.

"The show is all imagination based and we treat it that way," Mow says. "It could be the way in which we portray pirate ships or a sword fight that might

happen with a plunger and a feather duster, but I think it will push people's expectations of what a show like this can be in this area. I'm really excited to be part of a show with this level of ensemble work."

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