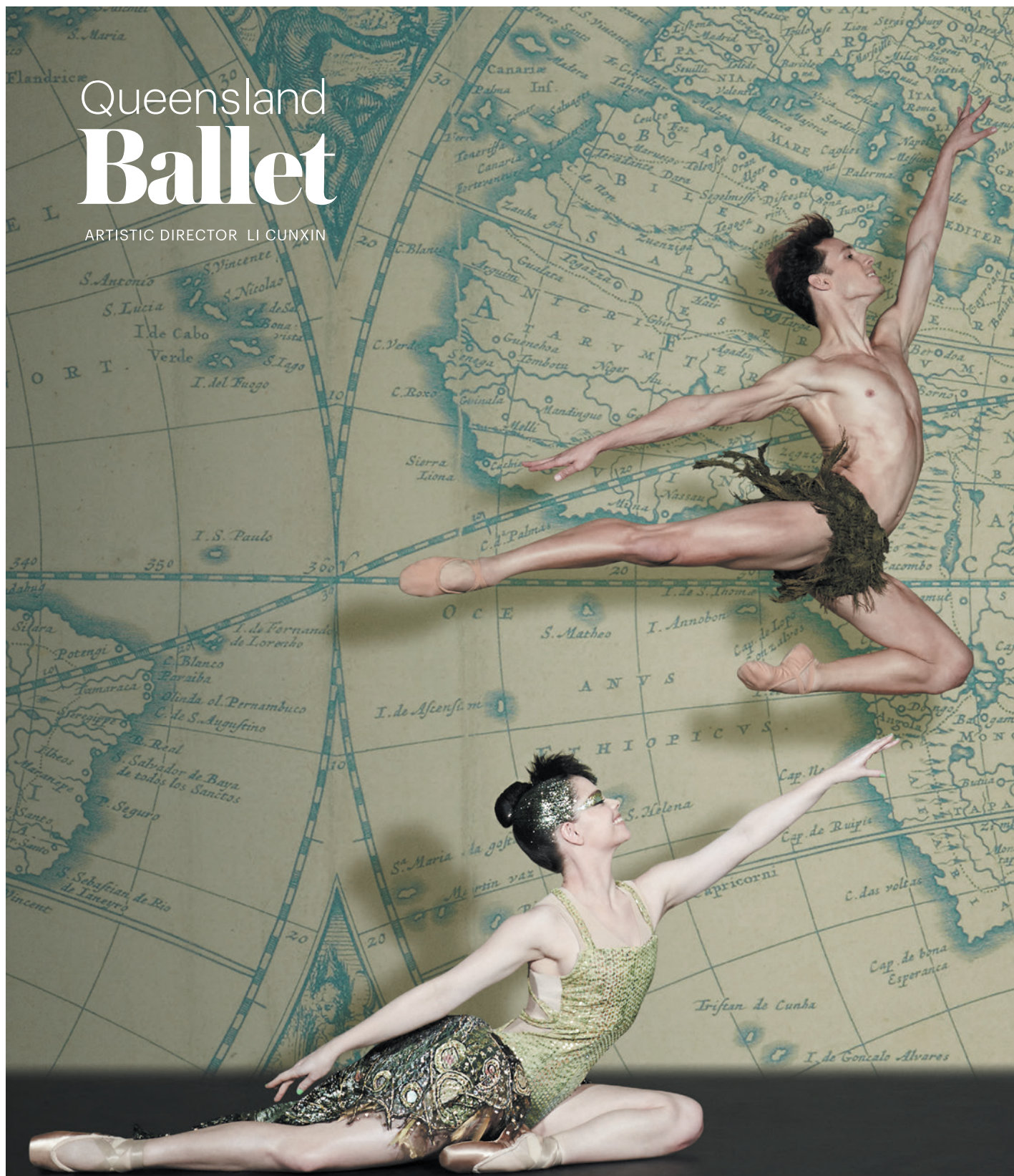


Queensland Ballet

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR LI CUNXIN



PETER PAN

Production Notes for the Classroom

Contextual Information

Choreographer Trey McIntyre

Composer Sir Edward Elgar, arranged by Niel DePonte

Conductor Nigel Gaynor

Music performed by Queensland Symphony Orchestra

Costume Designer Jeanne Button

Lighting Designer Christina R. Giannelli

Set Designer Thomas Boyd

OVERVIEW

First written as a character in a section of James Matthew Barrie's 1902 novel, *The Little White Bird*, *Peter Pan* is over 100 years old. Since then the narrative has been the inspiration for Hollywood films (such as *Hook*, 1991; and *Pan*, 2015), Disney animations (*Peter Pan*, 1953; and *Return to Neverland*, 2002), children's novels, television series, ballet and musical theatre productions and even the name of a thoroughbred racehorse.

There are many present-day versions of *Peter Pan* performed, with different choreography to different music. However dual themes of sunlight and shadow, romance and adventure, fantasy and reality, and spectacle and intimacy remain consistent among productions (with minor variations).

Most generally, *Peter Pan* is the tale of a boy who never grew up.

ORIGINS OF THE NARRATIVE

Scottish novelist and playwright Barrie first created *Peter Pan* as a seven-day-old baby in several chapters of the 1902 novel — *The Little White Bird*. In these chapters, Peter flies away from his home to reside in Kensington Gardens and make friends with the fairies. In 1906 Barrie republished the chapters from *The Little White Bird* in a standalone book titled *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*.

Between these publications, Barrie wrote the children's play *Peter Pan* in 1904. During this play, Peter, who is aged 12 or 13, brings Wendy and her brothers to Neverland, where he has a showdown with his nemesis, Captain Hook. The play was successful and Barrie donated the copyright and all of the proceeds to the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children. The play was later adapted and expanded into a novel, published in 1911 as *Peter and Wendy*, where Wendy Darling and her two brothers John and Michael were first introduced to the narrative.

PETER PAN THE CHARACTER

The character, Peter, was inspired by Barrie's older brother who died in an ice-skating accident a day before turning 14. His mother continued to talk about David as a boy and this concept of eternal youth is reflected in Peter — the boy who never grew up.

The character's name was also inspired by Pan, a minor deity of Greek mythology who represents man's natural state and plays pipes to nymphs. This is reflected in Peter's free spirit and in the novella (short novel), *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, Peter plays pipes to the fairies.



Contextual Information

TREY MCINTYRE

Trey McIntyre trained at North Carolina School of the Arts and Houston Ballet Academy. In 1989, he was appointed Choreographic Apprentice at Houston Ballet, and in 1995 he became the company's Choreographic Associate. In 2005, Trey founded his dance company, Trey McIntyre Project (TMP), which first appeared at the Vail International Dance Festival. TMP has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Dance Magazine*, and on PBS NewsHour, and has earned wide acclaim in American media. McIntyre is the recipient of numerous awards, including a Choo San Goh Award for Choreography and a Lifetime Achievement Award from The National Society of Arts and Letters.

Working for over 20 years as a freelance choreographer, McIntyre has created close to 100 dance pieces, many of which have been performed by companies such as Stuttgart Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Hubbard Street Dance (Chicago), New York City Ballet, The Washington Ballet, Oregon Ballet Theatre and Queensland Ballet.

THE PRODUCTION

Peter Pan was McIntyre's first full-length work, first performed in 2002 by the Houston Ballet at the Brown Theater, Wortham Theater Center in Houston, Texas. The production combines dance, pantomime, puppets, sword fights and slapstick humour to convey a narrative based on Barrie's early 20th Century plays and novels.

McIntyre's interpretation follows Barrie's narrative where three Darling children are whisked away from their London home to the magical world of Neverland, home of Peter Pan and his merry gang of Lost Boys, fairies and a band of pirates. McIntyre also draws on the dark satire of Barrie's classic tale, exploring themes that juxtapose the whimsy of childhood with the pain of growing up.

Some notable differences between McIntyre's ballet and Barrie's works include Tinkerbell's diminutive role within the ballet, the absence of Nana (the dog), and the addition of Hook's son, James. McIntyre also offers hints at beginning of Act One of how the Lost Boys find their way to Neverland. He indicates Peter is Wendy's brother — in fact, one overactive child rolls out of a perambulator (pram) and is swept offstage with a broom, who when unclaimed, is sent away to Neverland.

Take the hand of Peter Pan
and come on a journey to
the fabled Neverland...



McIntyre's Production

SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE – THE DARLING HOME

When the Darling children were born, they were left in the care of nursemaids. From their tiny perspective, the nurses are vicious giants capable of horrible acts. But the four Darling children – Wendy, John, Michael and Peter — don't worry much because fairies visit their nursery regularly, making them feel safe. Early in his life, young Peter Darling made the dreadful mistake of falling out of his carriage and was swept away with the garbage by one of the nursemaids.

One evening, Mr and Mrs Darling come to bid Wendy, John and Michael goodnight. They are on their way to a party and leave the children in the care of their new nursemaid, Liza. Wendy later dreams that she is dancing among the shadows. Her dream turns into a nightmare, but Wendy is saved by a mysterious shadow that seems somehow familiar to her. She is awakened from her dream by a bright light that darts about the room and into her dresser. As she investigates, a wild boy with a mane of great red hair bursts into the room. He introduces himself as Peter Pan. John and Michael wake up, and begin to play with Peter. The dresser drawer begins to rumble, and Peter explains that it is a tiny fairy named Tinkerbell. After releasing Tinkerbell from the drawer, Peter and the three young Darling children set off on an adventure for Neverland.

ACT TWO – NEVERLAND

When Peter arrives in Neverland with Wendy and the boys in tow, the Lost Boys beg him to recount his adventures. He dazzles them with wild stories. The Darling children are quickly welcomed into their tribe and Wendy is asked to be their mother, which she happily accepts. Neverland becomes the scene of a raucous, celebration.

Later in the evening, Captain Hook, who also resides in Neverland along with his pirate crew, plot to capture one of the enchanting mermaids. They capture the most beautiful mermaid, but her cries quickly awaken Peter and the others. A great battle ensues, with the Lost Boys ultimately prevailing.

The Lost Boys return to Peter's hideout and prepare for bed. Wendy reflects longingly on her home and the parents she left behind. The Lost Boys decide they want to visit her homeland. Unable to understand why Wendy is unhappy, Peter becomes furious, and throws everyone out of the hideout. One by one, the Pirates capture all except Wendy who Captain Hook greets with a request to sympathise with his traumatic childhood. Hook shows Wendy a film of when he was young and his awful school teacher beat him on the wrist, causing his hand to form a hook shape.

This is not a film, but a play — a ruse in which Hook has his own son, James, to perform as his younger self. Wendy however realises Hook is using a ploy, and the Pirates tie her up and bring her back to the ship. Hook then sends his son James to Peter Pan who is still hiding. James eventually succeeds in luring Peter from his hiding place and uses a sword to presumably kill Peter.

ACT THREE – CAPTAIN HOOK'S SHIP

As the Pirates dance, to celebrate their victory, James contemplates his immoral deeds. Hook tries to convince the Darling children into joining his group of pirates, but they refuse. Frustrated with their response, Hook ties the Darling children up with the Lost Boys and abuses them with tales of the horrible things he will do to them. Hook becomes so distracted with his soliloquy that he doesn't notice when Peter sneaks on board the ship.

A battle begins, and the Lost Boys quickly gain the upper hand. Sensing the possibility of defeat, Hook tries to escape with Wendy, but Peter intervenes and challenges him to a duel. Hook fights arrogantly, making a great show, but Peter ultimately triumphs over him, with some unexpected assistance from James.

The Darling children go home and reunite with their parents.

Wendy takes her place in her mother's rocking chair and, as she grows older, reflects on her adventures with Peter.

McIntyre's Production

MOVEMENT

Movements in McIntyre's *Peter Pan* are influenced by a variety of genres and styles and are used to distinguish main characters such as Peter or Wendy, as well as groups of Neverland citizens such as the Pirates, Lost Boys and mermaids/merman.

Peter's movements are raw and wild. He crouches down close to the floor (like a stray dog) and sniffs new acquaintances such as the children and surroundings to determine his whereabouts. His acrobatic and athletic movements are executed with a high energy and strong force, portraying Peter's youthful and charismatic personality, uninhibited by adult codes of behaviour. Using wired harnesses and flight technology, McIntyre has also added aerial movements into the fabric of the movement language including mid-air tumbles and somersaults, twists and leaps.

In contrast to Peter, Wendy dances classical ballet movements with a fluid and smooth quality, light energy and weightlessness. With strong placement and suspended balances, Wendy's determination and poise of a child on the brink of womanhood shines through. Similarly, the mermaids and merman of Neverland also feature light and fluid classical ballet movements such as arabesques, couru, pirouettes and chainés, which for the mermaids, are performed en pointe.

McIntyre also contrasts the Darling children who move naturally with their parents who move in stiff, angular and robotic waltzes, like possessed marionettes. This juxtaposition emphasises the children's alienation from their parents.

MUSIC

***Peter Pan* is set to a score of music** by English composer, Sir Edward Elgar (1857 – 1934), a composer rarely associated with ballet. Elgar was among the finest English composers of his generation, and a significant figure among late Romantic European musicians.

The *Peter Pan* score was arranged by American-born Niel DePonte who selected 22 pieces of Elgar's less known works. The music includes emotionally evocative pieces such as Wand of Youth, Suites 1 & 2 for the opening scenes of Act One; and In the South Overture for Peter's victory over Captain Hook in Act Three. The expressive and melodic compositions provide abundant colour for the dance, puppetry and flying.

SET

The oversized, almost abstract sets of *Peter Pan* bring audiences into the mind of the children, where anything is possible and things are not necessarily as they seem. Set Designer, Thomas Boyd, has created a colourful set which comprises many separate, moving parts that suggest place. However, the expressionistic and surreal aesthetic allow the two worlds of fantasy and reality to merge.

Using a playful sense of scale with giant prams and beds, the Darling home has a surrealist quality and presents the world as if seen through a child's eyes. The beds are festooned with flowers and vines highlighting the connection between the children's world and the dream world — Neverland.

Neverland's set consists of a pink and purple flowered and forested landscape.

In Act Three, Boyd has created a pirate ship which resembles a human rib-cage; it is both scary and whimsical, playing off the ambiguity embedded in the piece.

COSTUME

Jeanne Button's costumes reinforce Boyd's use of scale to present a world seen through a child's eyes.

The opening Act includes a frightful image of imposing, seven-foot-tall puppet nursemaids. These nursemaids wear black, draping outfits and black gloves which extend their alien-like fingers and their voluminous black hair is tied up in a bun. Creating a similar effect, the Darling parents wear stoic white masks, becoming cold, imposing and non-relatable.

Other characters such as Peter are portrayed unconventionally, wearing a red wig, a green Tarzan-like loin cloth and two black belts.

Though seen few times throughout the production, the crocodile is part costume and part puppetry. Created through a collaboration between Boyd and Button, the dancer's costume consists of a green unitard. The dancer embeds themselves in an oversized crocodile puppet which is made from the same green fabric, their legs becoming the hind legs of the crocodile. The front two legs and tail move automatically as the dancer travels across the space. The puppet jaw which opens and closes is manipulated by the dancer's hands.

PETER PAN

Q & A with Trey McIntyre

CHOREOGRAPHER

Peter Pan is ageless and timeless, why do you think this is so?

Peter Pan deals lovingly with what I think is one of the greatest puzzles of being human: the finality of existence and the sadness of growing old and dying. I believe the story speaks to the parts of us that long to be free and youthful but also reminds us of the parts of us that are eternal.

Your own version of Peter Pan is almost 15 years old. Do works mature? What drives this evolution?

The work definitely evolves over time and this is caused by different dancers inhabiting the various roles. Every time I work with a new cast of dancers, I find myself exploring and experimenting with new ways to describe the characters, informed by my own insights and learnings that I have developed throughout my career. This has an impact on the movement choices and also the ways the dancers interpret and perform the roles.



Audiences are often surprised to see ballet dancers fly through the air. How did you plan and create the flying sections of Peter Pan when there is no flying systems in ballet studios?

Shortly before creating *Peter Pan*, I had performed in and developed a flying solo for Michael Curry's *Spirits*. During the development of *Spirits*, I spent about eight months working with a flying rig which was new at the time. I wanted to carry as much of the knowledge I learned from this experience forward into *Peter Pan*. I wasn't interested in dancers being lifted and placed down in a gimmick-like way. Instead, I wanted them to dance through the air.

When choreographing Peter's solo for the first time, I had two days working collaboratively with a dancer in the Foy Studios, Las Vegas. I was so prepared going into these rehearsals that we completed the solo on the first day, allowing us to spend the second day experimenting with the technology. This included attaching myself to a giant bungee cord and the Foy Studio crew pulling me back by my ankles to see how far I could catapult across the space.

When I originally staged the ballet on the Houston Ballet, we set up a rig in a warehouse that emulated the dimensions of the Wortham Theater. The dancers, crew and I spent a week determining the timing required to pull the ropes to hoist and lower the dancers. Once this was established we were ready for performance.

The flying is always the most difficult part of the production to get right but it is a tremendous feeling when it all comes together.



Q & A with Shaun O'Rourke

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER

Peter Pan involves aerial dancing using flying equipment. Describe how this equipment works.

There are two types of flying equipment used in *Peter Pan* — automated and manual.

Peter wears a harness which connects to two wires at his hips. These connect to a bungee cord above him, allowing Peter to have more control when jumping and landing as well as executing flips and somersaults. This bungee then attaches to the grid which directs his movement across the stage on lateral wires. The motors on this automated system are computer-programed to lift Peter to different heights and carry him laterally across the stage (stage left to stage right).

In contrast, Wendy, Michael and John wear harnesses which connect to a single wire from the back of their necks. Consequently, they are unable to flip or somersault. Two backstage fly crew work manually with each of these dancers and using counter-weight systems, one controls their vertical movement and one controls their lateral movement.

How did Queensland Ballet help familiarise the dancers with the flying equipment in preparation for the performances?

Firstly, I hand drew all the flying movements as different cues. For example, one cue might include jumping up, travelling across the space and then landing. We discussed these cues and the movements we were trying to achieve with the dancers.

Once in the theatre we commenced a series of short 15 minute rehearsals to familiarise the dancers and crew with aerial movements and to help them feel comfortable. We eventually added sideways movements across the stage and if they're performing the role of Peter, they explored flips and somersaults through trial-and-error. We finished the process by blocking the choreography.

What is the most challenging production element of Peter Pan?

The flying is the most challenging production element of *Peter Pan*. There are more variables which could potentially go wrong than when a dancer is performing on the ground. There are also challenges with the equipment from a technical perspective — if the dancer travels too far upstage or downstage, the equipment can catch on other rigging above the stage. We certainly prepare for these challenges to limit and control as many variables as possible and to ensure the dancers are always safe.

Are production elements continuing to evolve and if so why and how? What impact does this have on the art form and audiences?

Absolutely — moving lights are a great example, as they provide many options and possibilities for lighting designers. One moving light can provide the same effect created by 20 regular theatre lights and furthermore moving lights do not require gobos or gels.

Peter's flying technology is another great example. When *Peter Pan* was first performed by the Houston Ballet in 2002 and again in 2004, Peter's flying was executed manually, like Wendy, Michael and John are now.

Later Trey then opted for computerised and automated technology to fly Peter. The technology affords more flexibility and choreographic options, enhancing the adventurous movements. With automation, the flying is also safer, more consistent and once programed can be recreated easily when the production is restaged elsewhere.

Unfortunately, the automated system requires a more meticulous, tedious and lengthy rehearsal period, impacting schedules and human resource timetables.

What do you most enjoy about your role as a Production Stage Manager?

Before every show, I remind myself of the patrons who are coming to experience the magic of ballet; it's the whole reason we do what we do — it may be a young five-year-old who is seeing *Peter Pan* the ballet for the first time.

The potential impact we can have on individuals is special and continues to inspire me!

Queensland Ballet

For more information about how Queensland Ballet supports students and teachers, or to discuss ways to get involved with us, please contact:

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