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REVIEW: 'Peter and the Starcatcher' at Steel River in Pottstown

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"Peter and the Starcatcher" is quite unlike anything I have ever seen -- it's a multilayered comedy with a gifted ensemble cast and lots of one-liners that have double, sometimes triple, meanings. The antics of the actors had the audience laughing loud and often.

The story, a prequel to the beloved "Peter Pan," is told by a dozen actors playing more than 100 different roles. You'd think that might be confusing, but due to talented actors using different voices and accents and body language and clever costumes, it's easy to keep track of the characters -- and they are characters. You'll find a lord and his spunky daughter, pirates and mermaids, and a native tribe who language will surprise you.

Though this is not a full song and dance musical, there are some action scenes that are almost choreographed in their precision. Props are also used in an ingenious way, adding sound and rhythm. The scene with books is genius and adds so much to the production.

Though the play is written comedy by Rick Elice based on the best-selling novel by Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson, the director and cast have added their own special touches and it shows in the chemistry on stage. Sometimes it's hard to tell who's having more fun -- the cast or the audience. The script is full of lots of wordplay which adds another layer to this delightful comedy. This is an over-the-top, imaginative romp -- think Monty Python meets Disney.

The cast includes some veteran actors, some newcomers to Steel River and several young actors from the theater program at Montgomery Community College and they all work together like a well-oiled machine. This is truly an equally-talented ensemble cast with a flare for comedy and the absurd. They all play multiple roles (sometimes switching genders which adds to the hilarity) so I'll just mention them and their major roles.

Stephen Waters plays the Boy (and Peter) who sets out on this zany adventure with his orphan friends Prentiss played by Jared Pinkham and Ted played by Sebastian Antonio.

Brian Rock plays Lord Aster who a starcatcher . He is off on a special mission for the queen and tagging along is his feisty daughter, Molly, played by Katie Stahl. Molly is an assistant starcatcher who befriends the lost boys.

Brian McVeigh steals a few scenes at Mrs. Brumbake, Molly's nanny. The romance that develops between Mrs. Brumbake and a sailor named Alf, played by Joe Donley, adds lots of laughs to the show.

Maria Jarrell is a master of switching personae and seems to relish the role of the bad guy and she gets to do that as Gremkin, the mean schoolmaster of the orphanage and Slank the Captain of the ship, Neverland.

Eric Rupp also gets to make the most of being a villain as Black Stache the pirate who is accompanied by his loyal first mate, Smee played by Tess Devlin.

Zoe Miller brings her comedic skills to several roles, including Sanchez, one of Black Stache's crew and Hawking Clam the son of the chief of the native tribe.

Christopher Waters plays Captain Scott, the captain of The Wasp, the ship carrying Lord Astor on his mission. Waters also adds music to the show, with drums that set the tone for various scenes.

"Peter and the Starcatcher" is directed by Jay Gilman. Adding to the complete package of this show are Ally Boughter (costume design), Chris Kleckner (scenic design), Jerry Jonas (lighting), Morgan Carrasquillo (prop design) and Stacey Michaud (dialect coach.)

"Peter and the Starcatcher" runs through Oct. 16. Tickets are \$17 to \$29 and are available online at www.steelriver.org, or by calling the Box Office at 610-970-1199. Don't forget that you can choose your seat when you book online, so buy your tickets early to get the best choice. Groups of 10 or more are eligible for discounts.

About Steel River Playhouse

Steel River Playhouse is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) charitable education and performance facility that seeks to strengthen community, inspire creative exploration, educate, and entertain, through the presentation of quality performing arts events and education for diverse audiences.

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