



STAFF PICK

## P.J. Horgan's *Peter Pan* Stays True to Its Literary Roots

BY ASHLEY MORTON

*The 2003 adaptation brings J.M. Barrie's famous story into current-day while still honoring its source material.*

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Oh, the cleverness of *Peter Pan*. Even those who have not read J.M. Barrie's classic have a basic understanding of its themes thanks to the very many iterations it's inspired: Barrie himself transformed his own original version, a play, into a novel. Walt Disney took a pass at a retelling in the 1953 animated film version, and through the years we've seen adaptations, prequels and sequels, from Steven Spielberg's iconic *Hook* starring Dustin Hoffman and Robin Williams, to the latest (less memorable) revamp, *Pan*, by Joe Wright. Many of these films offer their own takes on the story of the boy who refused to grow up, oftentimes sacrificing the incredible language, impishness and poignancy of Barrie's source material. 2003's *Peter Pan*, written and directed by P.J. Hogan (director of *My Best Friend's Wedding*), however, brings back what was lost.

Hogan wisely allows his updates roll with the times, keeping it fresh, while still maintaining the essence of the original work. Wendy Darling is our real hero: We follow her from London to Neverland and back, watching as she takes captivates with her storytelling, sword fights with the best of them, and ultimately realizes when it's time to return home. She is a strong female character in a world full of self-assured men, and holds her own in every scene. One of the film's few misses might be that it wasn't called *Peter and Wendy*, the alternate title of the play.

Stocked with kid-friendly elements, Hogan's *Peter Pan* may be a film for children, but is one of the few that retains the true darkness of Barrie's version. Wendy (Rachel Hurd-Wood), a young girl who loves to tell stories and play pretend with her brothers, is faced with the fact that she is on the verge of growing up. Try as she might, she cannot conceal the maturity that comes through on her face in the form of a secret "kiss" — a dimple on her chin, similar to the one her mother (played by the luminescent Olivia Williams) bears. Faced with the prospect of leaving her imaginary world behind, Wendy flies off with a strange boy to Neverland, but her adoration

of Pan (Jeremy Sumpter) slowly dims as she learns his ability to stay youthful comes at a cost — his emotions are over-simplified, and he cannot truly love her the way she wants. *Peter Pan* has always been about the realization that we cannot — nor should we — cling to our childhood. The greatest adventures come from living life to the fullest.

Heavy stuff for a “kids’ movie,” but this was the dilemma Barrie asked his audiences to consider, and Hogan’s film, visually reminiscent of a young person’s *Moulin Rouge*, does the same. The movie does not sacrifice imagination for depth, nor does it go so far into action-adventure that it is without emotional impact. The scene where Peter screams into the void about believing in fairies to desperately revive a dying Tinkerbell is full of purity and emotion, and will have you reciting the words with him as the music swells.

Hogan maintains accuracy to scenes and dialogue in a manner other adaptations do not, from building a house around a fallen Wendy, to the reminder of how children emulate adult things without understanding their full definition (the rowdy Lost Boys are thrilled to have a “Mother” when Wendy arrives so that someone can tell them stories and make them take their medicine, for instance.)

Another favorite choice: Allowing the talented Jason Isaacs (of the *Harry Potter* series) to serve as both George Darling and James Hook, just as it was written in the play. These thoughtful details link the movie to the Barrie’s work, and despite an adjusted ending, Hogan’s *Peter Pan* is the most touching and accurate film version of the play.

“To die would be an awfully big adventure,” says Peter. Deep words for a child, but wholly appropriate in a film that believe a kids’ movie can possess a literary soul, true emotion and thoughtful questions.



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