

Peter Pan at St Mary's Primary School, Pulborough

July 2011

The magic of a Big Top performance thrills the body in so many ways: the novelty of being indoors yet out of doors, the artificial "room" it creates, the curious light, the oddity of grass not flooring between the rows together with the romance of the travelling circus, extensively exploited in literature of a certain vintage! Whatever the salient feature in your view, it makes for a truly memorable event. And as adults responsible for the young, we should be creating memories for them

Even without the huge buzz generated by throwing up a vast marquee in the next field, this play will have proved a dominant memory for the cast, let alone for the audience. The sheer enthusiasm of all involved is surely testament to that, from the earnest piratical swashbuckling, through the concentration of dancers or singers, to the breadth of the smiles on the faces of the chorus when spotted by family looking on.

Initial nervousness gave way in moments to more confident singing and moving, with Wendy Darling playing the true professional, leading her protégés, gliding through the numbers with practised ease, demonstratively reacting to the plot development. The same endeavour was clearly visible in the faces of the Lost Boys, eagerly working to express their dismay at the threat of attack from marauding pirates: hard to tell which group was enjoying it most! The disarming charm of the gentle Smee illustrates this perfectly, with evident relish taken in delivering lines that implied typical piracy, yet clear delight taken in thwarting Captain Hook, whose swagger and bluster were conveyed with the full-blooded conviction of the true pantomime villain! The Indians trod the knife edge between nobility and savagery with pride and whole-hearted determination, while the littler Darlings' combination of smiles and open-mouthed wonder gave proof of the pleasure they took in retelling the story. Meanwhile the assurance of Peter Pan, the smooth heroism, the innocent bravado and the readily appreciated yearning for eternal youth (poignant, given the leap Year 6 are about to take), seemed to orchestrate the venture with a guiding surety.

That this should have been achieved in just six weeks makes it so much more remarkable. Words will have been learned and actions coned through focused repetition which has no doubt dominated classroom and breakfast table alike – even those too young to perform were sitting in the audience reproducing the moves on the stage, silent witnesses to the single-minded training that must have filled the last weeks! Such memories!

Memories that will be more intense, lasting and valued as a result of the extraordinary adult input: what other PTA, governing body or staff room will be devoting themselves to such a grand enterprise? Extensive hours and resources will have been expended in fund-raising for the Big Top itself, never mind in setting up the elaborate light rig, in painting the series of grand backdrops, regularly unfolded to reveal yet another vision, in establishing the enviable sound system that overcame the distance and breadth of audience, that gave Tinkerbell her striking trill and the singers the confidence to fill the house, and in laying on the magical effects such as the mounted bubble

blowers, and the eerily gaseous smoke machine. Top that with the excellent accompanying musicianship that lulls, reassures and impels throughout.

With an array of assistance that is so far-reaching, it would be daunting to try to create costumes to live up to expectation, yet the wardrobe mistress, whose talents were already on display in the tepee outside, sacrificed nothing in the quest for clarity and authenticity. Furthermore the huge variety of outfits amongst the chorus indicates the extent of the support that is available.

I know of many schools who would be thoroughly envious of this production; that it should be the product of so much communal spirit and voluntary support makes it that much more memorable. And creating memories for the children gives them something of value for the rest of their lives...

Thank you, St Mary's, for a wonderful evening's entertainment.