

## A new 'Neverland' returns

YAW reprises successful 1994 musical STACY TREVENON / Half Moon Bay Review / May 8, 1998

Peter Pan has landed on the Coastside, bigtime.

On Friday, May 8, barely a week after the Coastal Conservatory Theatre closed a two-weekend production of "Peter Pan" modeled after the 1956 Mary Martin film, 85 students of Young Actors Workshop are scheduled to open "Neverland," a more improvisational musical fantasy featuring original songs written by the actors.

And, proving that time flies just like Peter Pan, this "Neverland" cast includes some of the 90 young actors who, in 1994, created and staged the original "Neverland: The New Adventures of Peter Pan." The rest of the original cast is invited, as guests of YAW, to see how their 1998 counterparts have retouched the roles they created.

"Someone will be playing us?" gasped Half Moon Bay High School student Jen Long, who, with fellow high school student Nicole McFadden, created and played Captain Hook's evil sisters Lana and Rachel in 1994. "It's going to be interesting to see how they interpret the tone of the characters."

"Neverland" took flight again thanks to YAW director Auri Naggar's wish to reprise the successful 1994 musical, which set a theatrical precedent with its fresh improvisation. Though the storyline, songs and characters are basically the same, this production gains a different flavor with the new actors' personal stamps, said Naggar.

"It's great to see the interpretation kids put on parts that are uniquely their own, as compared to a different actor who did the same part," he said.

Many of the actors said that "Neverland" gives Peter Pan a unique slant in the first place.

"It's so funny, the way we've twisted it," said Kelsey Currier, 13, who plays Wendy, a bigger challenge than the fairy she played as a 9-year-old.

"People come to expect (the conventional) 'Peter Pan,' and, oh my gosh, will they get a surprise."

Indeed, while Peter Pan still hasn't grown up, he's evolved. The story is about imagination and a young girl who refuses to use hers. Her parents, passionate fans of Peter Pan, have named their three children Wendy, John and Michael. Except that "John" is that girl, who, resentful of her parents' fixation on Peter Pan and her peers' teasing about her name, grows up withdrawn and unhappy.

She turns up her nose when Wendy and Michael say they see Peter Pan and Tinkerbell, and refuses to acknowledge that she's in Neverland — so named, says one resident, because while Peter Pan could fly well, he just could never land. Peter Pan, played by 12-year-old Adam Coopersmith, who played a rock back in 1994, is now more of an action hero, all panache in a sequined metallic green suit and hat.

Neverland is a tropical island populated by whimsical Natives, Fairies of Goodlight, Super Special Rocks, Trolls and Lost Children. There, Wendy, Michael and a sullen John attend the Monster Truck Rally to root for champion driver Taco Bell, Tinker's brother, until the dastardly Captain Hook threatens disaster. It's up to John to find her imagination and save the day.

The fact that YAW's fertile young imaginations spawned "Neverland" in the first place drives home the whole point of the story, said Peggy Holsclaw, 13, who was a Lost Child in 1994 and is John in 1998.

"The play is about imagination," she said. "It's not what a name is about. It's attitude and what's inside that counts."

Holsclaw herself needed more than imagination to tackle both the role of John with YAW and the role of Wendy in the Coastal Theatre Conservatory production. She said that keeping the two straight was just a matter of memorization.

"Neverland" runs from May 8 through 17, at 7:30 p.m. Fridays and 2 p.m. Sundays in the multipurpose room of Cunha Intermediate School. Tickets, at \$5, are available at Eriksen Art and Framing, Bay Book and Video and at the door. For more information, call YAW at 726-1304.