

"Peter Pan" is by far the most elaborate of ballets staged by the Mystic Ballet in its "Dance Me a Story" series, created to lure the young to classical dance through story ballets.



Heather Brustolon as Wendy, Maegan Garvey as Michelle and Aleksander Subotic as John in the flying scene from last year's production.

## GET HOOKED!



Davide Vittorino plays the nasty Captain Hook in Mystic Ballet's "Peter Pan" at the Garde Arts Center Nov. 25-26. Photos by Carlotta Dietel

Mystic Ballet reprises popular 'Peter Pan' at Garde Nov. 25-26

By Sharma Howard  
Times Arts Editor

Toes peeking through tattered ballet slippers, the group of teenage girls huddles together at the entrance to the dance studio at Mystic's Dance Palace.

They sit and wait for two lead dancers — Peter Pan, danced by Marissa Pulaski, and Captain Hook, performed by Davide Vittorino — to duke it out in their ongoing epic battle.

"We're definitely the comic relief to the ballet," said Jessica Dennison of Noank, of the roles the six girls will play as a group of reveling pirates that are more slapstick than menacing in the Mystic Ballet's upcoming production of "Peter Pan." The ballet will come to the Garde Arts Center Friday, Nov. 25, and again on Saturday, Nov. 26.

The group of girls smiled, some sporting braces, their hair tied neatly back.

If they are disappointed they aren't in tutus, they don't show it; on the contrary, they brim with excitement for their upcoming performance. All of them danced the pirate roles last year at the ballet's premiere, bolstering their confidence and their ability to have fun and improvise.

"We're the fun part of the show. We do a tango dance, drink tequila and celebrate. A lot of our dance is done as if no one is watching," said Valerie Dietel.

"We try to be tough, but we're really not," chimed in another student.

"One thing nice we did last year was build our character off the energy of each other," said Dennison, adding that someone always has a new idea to make it better.

And new ideas, agreed Goran Subotic, the president and founder of the Mystic Ballet, can arise from even accidents. Some kids from the audience, when asked the part they liked best last year, said they liked it when Peter banged into the wall.

Subotic, in a relaxed mood, laughed. The wall banging, of course, was an accident, the product of kinks yet to be adjusted. He is upbeat that the unveiling of the production last year was well received.

"Peter Pan" is by far the most elaborate of ballets staged by the Mystic Ballet in its "Dance Me a Story" series, created to lure the young to classical dance through story ballets that are familiar with, such as "Cinderella," "The Little Mermaid" and "Snow White."

And "Peter Pan," introduced before the holiday season, offers up a clever alternative to the ballet synonymous with Christmas, "The Nutcracker,"

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a ballet Subotic didn't want to compete with.

It's a savvy marketing and business move, as is the goal of touring the company's production in the future.

It's this sort of business acumen and creativity that has fueled the success of the Dance Palace. Subotic, a native of Yugoslavia, came to have a passion for dance through his wife, Desiree, a former professional dancer (who gave up her career at a fairly young age to raise her son, Aleksander, and dedicate herself to teaching). Together, the two combined their talents, opening a school in downtown Mystic in 1992 before moving to a permanent location attached to their home in 1997.

Desiree stands tall, her stately stance a mellow presence, turning the music on and off, clarifying the choreography with the dancers, while Goran, a self-professed type A personality, rises frequently from his seat to

add motivation, spice and fire.

"We're working on the comedy," Goran said. "The dancers are amazing ... amazing. You give them the choreography, but it's up to the individual dancer's interpretation. ... If they believe, you believe."

And believing is, after all, one of the tenets of "Peter Pan."

Which is why the elaborate set comes in handy, as well as the flying that Subotic, with no small effort, accomplished by hiring a flying company to set up the wires and train the dancers. Also, the set must utilize the Garde stage very economically, so the logistic challenges Subotic had to overcome have been great.

And the dancers keep the fantasy fresh. While clearly having fun on stage, they are also very well suited for their roles; like the willowy Heather Brustolon, who dances Wendy, her feet light and feathery.

The Mystic Ballet has also done a good job in incorporating a few key professional dancers in with their company. Davide

Vittorino is a dark and snaky Hook, and Dartanion Reed makes a brief but exciting appearance as Lean Wolf, an Indian warrior.

Real Indians make appearances as well. Joe Bearstail, in full regalia, performs a majestic, fast-paced solo as Thunder Child, and his brother, Kenny Merrick Jr., performs on the drums.

"It's a kids' ballet," said Reed, who has formed his own company, The Hartford City Ballet, which, for now, is under the non-profit umbrella of Mystic Ballet.

"It keeps me entertained — it's exciting, dazzling, all these people flying," said Reed, who partners Princess Tiger Lily.

And, as for dancing with students, Reed said it was refreshing, different from dancing with complaining professionals.

"They have a good time, and it's easy for you to have a good time," he said.

And that's what Peter Pan is all about: an impish dance into your heart, a tale that never grows old.



The Pirates: Davide Vittorino as Captain Hook, Valerie Dietel as Smee, Kathryn Yankowski as Cecco, Jessica Dennison as Fint and Jennifer Youmans as Cookson. Photo by Carlotta Dietel



Gianna Jacovini takes the part of Tiger Lily. Photos by Carlotta Dietel