



## CHESTER FILM SOCIETY PRESENTS:

### FINDING NEVERLAND

2004 UK-US 106 MINUTES (Planned Ending 9.50pm)

DIRECTED BY MARC FOSTER

STARRING Johnny Depp, Kate Winslet

Director Marc Forrester has found more than a bit of pixie dust in David Magee's adaptation of Alan Knee's play *The Man Who Was Peter Pan*. Now dubbed *Finding Neverland*, this glorious, moving drama charts Scottish playwright J.M. Barrie's road to his last work for the stage, *Peter Pan*.

In his 20-year career, the still boyish Johnny Depp has displayed a vivid sense of character that he's applied to roles as diverse as an undercover high school cop, a cheerfully untalented movie director, and a fey pirate. So who better to play Barrie, the playwright whose awesome imagination and insight into children led to the creation of his classic 1904 play? As young Peter Llewelyn Davies (Freddie Highmore) replies to a woman who thinks Peter is the real Peter Pan, as he points at Barrie, "No, I'm not—he is!"

Barrie meets Peter, his three brothers, and their widowed mother Sylvia (Kate Winslet) one day in a London park, at a particularly low point in his life. Not only is his marriage to socially ambitious Mary (Radha Mitchell) becoming ever more strained, but his latest play just flopped, leaving him to question his own judgment and feel pangs of guilt at letting his American backer Charles Frohman (Dustin Hoffman) down. The Llewelyn Davies boys—particularly overly serious Peter, who's shut down in the reaction to his father's recent death—intrigue Barrie and, more importantly, they inspire him.

What begins as lark in the park with Barrie entertaining the children by waltzing with his Newfoundland dog Porthos, who Barrie insists is a bear, turns into a friendship and a scandal. The children call him "Uncle Jim" and Sylvia looks on him as a close friend. But her mother, the imperious Emma du Maurier (Julie Christie) distrusts this interloper who is ruining her daughter's chances of finding a new husband by destroying her reputation. Mary Barrie is similarly nonplussed as her husband spends more and more time at the Llewelyn Davieses, as jealous of the children as she is of their mother. And Barrie's friend, Arthur Conan Doyle (Ian Hart), informs that others are hinting at even darker motives for his interest in the four brothers.

But Barrie will not be dissuaded, partially out of genuine affection for these lost boys whose grief over their father reminds him of a tragedy from his own childhood. But as he plays with these kids and encourages them to use their own imagination, it is unlocking something of his own and he begins to get back to that place he imagined in childhood, *Neverland*. Pretty soon, he's completed the play with the Newfie nanny, the crocodile with the clock in its belly, the pirates, the Lost Boys, Tinkerbell, and the eternal boy who can fly, *Peter Pan*. Frohman is aghast, "James, you're out of your mind." Nevertheless, he agrees to produce the play, and by opening night he's adjusted his assessment. "Genius."

From the look of this handsome production, it is apparent that Forrester took as much inspiration from Barrie as Barrie did from the Llewelyn Davies. *Finding Neverland* soars as Forrester invents ways to show what is going on inside Barrie's mind. A ringmaster dances with a circus bear among scores of clowns in an elegant hall; children jumping on beds suddenly take flight; an old lady's hand morphs into a hook; and so on. Not only that, he gets to indulge his visual sense with two separate stagings of *Peter Pan*, on stage and in a private performance arranged at Barrie's behest. At the same time, the drama remains very much grounded in the sadness that engulfs the Llewelyn Davies house, which Barrie is powerless to completely alleviate.

The very American Depp dons a decent Scottish accent to play Barrie, but the great stroke of his casting is simply that he so believable as a man who has never forgotten what it is like to be a child. Winslet is moving as the mother who will sacrifice anything to ensure that her children can move on from tragedy. And Forrester cast the children extremely well—Highmore is appropriately grave as Peter, and the boys playing his brothers are similarly well cast, right down to little Luke Spill playing the youngest, five-year-old Michael. Christie and Mitchell are the weak links. Though both women perform well, they are saddled with practically one-dimensional characters as the villains of the piece, a rare failure of screenwriter Magee's own imagination.

Some will gripe that this story doesn't exactly reflect the truth—Sylvia's husband was very much alive when J.M. Barrie met the family. But the film, like Barrie's play is a testament to the imagination and its amazing powers. This may not be the true story of how Barrie came to write *Peter Pan*, but why not tell it this way? It's easy to imagine that the story is true.

Pam Grady, Reel.com

Please note that tickets are now available for our 2006 Fun Night on Saturday 4th February, starting at 7.15pm. The venue for this event is the Bear & Billet in Lower Bridge Street where we have reserved the top floor for an evening of quizzes, short films and a finger buffet. Parking is available nearby. Tickets are just £6.

Previous events have always sold out quickly so please reserve your place now!

PLEASE RATE TONIGHT'S FILM USING THE SCALE BELOW. DETACH AND HAND IN AS YOU LEAVE.  
PLEASE LEAVE ANY COMMENTS ABOUT THIS FILM ON THE REVERSE OF THIS FORM. MANY THANKS.

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