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"Peter Pan: The Boy who Hated Mothers" a dark retelling for Today.

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Opening of the Play. Ron Morehouse (Slightly/Starkey)
Laura Ann Tull

[Peter Pan](#) is a story told in many versions since its birth by Scottish writer J.M. Barrie in the early 1900s. The Blank Theater is closing its 22nd Season with a new adaption of Barrie's novel "Peter and Wendy" written by Michael Lluberes and titled "Peter Pan: The Boy Who Hated Mothers." It is a dark retelling performed on a minimalistic set that uses basic theatrical techniques to capture the imagination and also causes one to reflect on the complex relationships that exist between adults and children, and the difficulty of [growing up](#) and letting go.

The play opens with no curtain, but a set that is reminiscent of a child's bed room from perhaps the 1900s, with a clock and lanterns hung on the wall of an earlier age. The entire play evolves in this one space, with the actors changing set pieces or hanging items on the walls to indicate a change in time or place. The use of the space is very ingenious, including Foley work on stage, rolling bright fabric, reminiscent of the fabric swung in traditional Chinese theater, as a part of the set design and a means of on stage special effects.

This is a story of children who always play but it is one written from an adult point of view. The play is about the tragedies of losing [childhood](#) innocence and the implications to adults as they have their children grow up and leave. The most cutting line of the play is delivered by Elizabeth Knowelden, who plays both Mrs. Darling and Captain Hook, as she states children are "gay, innocent, and heartless." According to her, it is an indication of the difficulty on parents of children growing up. At the same time Peter Pan, played by Royce Johnson, is a child who refuses to grow up and there are suggestions as to why that truly reflects issues in today's society. His character is the one after all who hates Mothers.

Of course the play has Peter Pan visiting Wendy Darling (Elle Johnson) and taking her and her brother John Darling (Henry Alberto). Not being familiar with the novel, this telling is very different from the media version current culture tells. There is much loss and sadness in the Darling House and reluctance to just get up and run away. This added bit creates a conflict that drives the play. One must note that this play is not traditionally cast. Wendy Darling is played by an African American Actress, and Hook is played by a woman, and it works very well.

The rest of this ensemble cast, Ron Morehouse (Slightly/Starkey), Christina Jon (Nibbs/ Bill Jukes/ Tiger Lilly), and John J. Joseph (Tootles/Smee) act as both members of Peter Pan's band of Lost Children and Pirates, Heathens and perform acrobatics and set changes during the run. And of course there is a Tinkerbelle, ingeniously made. This talented group of actors introduces the importance of story and how children learn of growing up through fairy tales and legends. One must not forget Captain Hook and his Crocodile who also make a bit of an appearance with techniques found often in Asian theater.

This play is laced with themes for these modern times. One can question at what point does a child become Heartless and is it the parents lack of love, or a child's growing indifference. Theater is not good if it does not leave one to question, ponder, or at least entertain. The power of theater is in its ability to deliver messages and morals. This play leaves one realizing how harsh living can be and how difficult growing up is for all. It perhaps may make one consider how things can be changed. Children are told they have to grow up by adults, and adults forget what it is to play as their children grow up and walk away.

Peter Pan: The Boy who Hated Mothers is playing at the Second Stage Theater, Friday, Saturday at 8pm and Sunday at 2pm, 6500 Santa Monica Blvd., through August the 18th. See the Blank Theaters website at www.TheBlank.com for tickets and details.

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