



Interactive production of Peter and the Starcatcher brings timely message of courage, commitment, and compassion to Orange County audiences

Director's background as a woman of color helps connect play's historical fiction with today's realities

COSTA MESA, CA (March 2018) – **The Arts & Learning Conservatory's (ALC)** upcoming production of Peter and the Starcatcher is an opportunity for both parents and their children to spend an unforgettable few hours together – offline. The popular prequel to Peter Pan, which has dazzled audiences from La Jolla to Broadway over the last decade, will make its debut at ALC.

"This show is very appealing for a director," says Vanessa Evans, the show's director. "The way it was written accords a lot of freedom for artistic expression." Evans, who directed the smash hit Hair Spray at ALC last summer, says her version stands apart from other productions on many levels, particularly in how it begins and ends. The production boasts an unconventional yet highly effective approach to both design and execution that even playwright Rick Elice may not have conjured when he brought the book series to the stage in 2009. This is partially due to the "theater-in-the-round" style in which this version of the show will be performed, allowing for much greater rapport between audience and actors.

The intimate ambience helps capture one of the major themes of the show: overcoming adversity in the face of uncertainty and daunting situations. "As a woman of color, I can really relate to the struggles of power and social status that Molly experiences," says Evans. "Growing up, my strong desire and drive to achieve was often misunderstood by others who were much more privileged both economically and racially. I admire Molly, who is ahead of her time in bravely and gracefully combatting gender discrimination as so many women are doing today." Another strength of ALC's production lies in the strong synergy of its cast members, whose ages range from 10 to 14. The cast – which includes both new and veteran ALC performers – are emphatic that "fun" and "exciting" are synonymous with this production. "It's a great balance between over-the-top funny and serious," says Makayla Campeau, who plays Molly.

Veteran ALC performer Rhys Cathey, who portrays Gremplin and Mack, among others, says, "It's one of the friendliest environments I've ever performed in."

"Ms. Vanessa has so many creative ideas that really highlight our talents," says Colin Baiocchi who plays Peter and has performed with ALC for two years. "What I like is that she has a clear vision of what she wants, but she is very accommodating when we have our own ideas that work well."

Katie Janecek, who is part of the ensemble, adds that the cast is really what makes this show special. This sentiment is echoed by Evans, who is a big believer in giving all cast members as much stage time as possible to develop their talent and impress audiences.

Ava Castillo, who also plays Molly, has been at ALC for five years in various shows. She admits she loves to perform with those with whom she's formed strong bonds but adds, "I'm always so impressed by how good newcomers are!" In addition to what is designed to be a spectacular ending with a twist, Evans hopes that younger audience members will also leave the show feeling empowered to seize opportunities in life that are right for them – no matter what other people think or say. She adds, "Don't ask for respect; politely command it."

Performances dates and times are March 22 at 7:00 pm, March 23 at 7:00 pm, March 24 at 2:00 pm and 7:00 pm and March 25 at 2:00 pm. Tickets can be purchased online at artsandlearning.org or call 714-728-7100.