

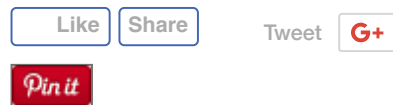


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FINDING NEVERLAND

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By *Erica Abeel* ([Http://Www.Filmjournal.Com/Taxonomy/Term/93](http://www.filmjournal.com/Taxonomy/Term/93)) Nov 12, 2004



Reviews

MIRAMAX/Color/2.35/Dolby Digital, DTS & SDDS/106 Mins./Rated PG <http://www.pinterest.com/pin/create/button>

Cast: Johnny Depp, Kate Winslet, Julie Christie, Radha Mitchell, Dustin Hoffman, Freddie Highmore, Joe Prospero, Nick Roud, Luke Spill, Ian Hart, Kelly Macdonald, Eileen Essell, Paul Whitehouse.

Credits: Directed by Marc Forster. Screenplay by David Magee, based on the play *The Man Who Was Peter Pan* by Allan Knee. Produced by Richard N. Gladstein, Nellie Bellflower. Director of photography: Roberto Schaefer. Production designer: Gemma Jackson. Edited by Matt Chesse. Music by Jan A.P. Kaczmarek. Costume designer: Alexandra Byrne. Visual effects designer: Kevin Tod Haug. Executive producers: Bob Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein, Michelle Sy, Gary Binkow, Neal Israel. Co-producer: Michael Dreyer. A Film Colony production.

Johnny Depp's cheekbones should be declared a national treasure. They are seen to good advantage, along with his magnetic gaze and Edwardian-style center-parted hair, in this captivating literary fable about the genesis of Scottish playwright J.M. Barrie's beloved Peter Pan. Playing fast and loose with the facts, *Finding Neverland* spells out how Peter, the boy without a shadow, Wendy, the crocodile with the ticking clock in its innards, and all the other denizens of a story that has long beguiled children and adults alike were inspired by the games Barrie invented for the four rambunctious sons of beautiful widow Sylvia Llewelyn Davies (Kate Winslet). That Sylvia is seriously ill, as it turns out, while her sons are still mourning the death of their father, could have turned all this unbearably slushy—but director Marc Forster (*Monster's Ball*) wisely mutes the violins and spotlights the playful whimsy that speaks to our inner Peter Pan.

The fertile relationship of Barrie with his surrogate family sprang from a chance encounter in London's Kensington Gardens, where he walked his St. Bernard, Porthos. Despite the cluck-clucking of the boys' protective grandmother (a still-beautiful Julie Christie), and the jealousy of his own wife (Radha Mitchell), Barrie spends his days with Sylvia and the boys, concocting a world of castles, Indians, pirates and castaways. Hillside becomes galleon ships, sticks mighty swords, and the Llewelyn Davies boys "The Lost Boys of Neverland"—all of which will coalesce into Barrie's masterwork. Not surprisingly, the Edwardian stiffnecks impute sinister motives to Barrie's liking for the boys. His sterile marriage (both senses) goes bust. And his producer (Dustin Hoffman, hamming it up big-time) fears Barrie's pixie dust will cause him to go bust, too.

At the center is the tantalizing, chaste love between Barrie and Sylvia. This romance that never tries to define itself is both original and strangely uplifting. For the most part, the filmmakers succeed in capturing Barrie's creative process with a seamless blend of reality and his fantasies, combining animation, CGI and the real actors (in a funny image, the grandmother morphs into Captain Hook), and letting the camera cavort with the roughhousing boys. I'd fault only the climactic glimpse of Neverland, an unhappy marriage of Disney, Hallmark, and Julie Taymor at her arched. As the put-upon widow, the excellent Winslet is suitably maternal, but far too blooming to be bedridden. However, it's Depp, sporting a Scottish accent, who carries the film with his daringly underplayed portrait of a man more at home in idyllic forests and lagoons than his own drawing room. As always, Depp is a great star because he refuses to act like one.

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