

Every villain needs a hero

August 30, 2017 Harold Duckett

Given his druthers, actor Charles Pasternak, who plays the villainous Black Stache in Clarence Brown Theatre's MainStage production of "Peter and the Starcatcher," beginning tomorrow night, would rather be playing Shakespeare. But the nature of an actor's search for work is take the best role offered to you at the moment, which, in the talented Pasternak's case, is the eponymously named pirate.

"Stache is the kind of charming pirate in the tradition of Captain Hook," Pasternak said, during a conversation about just how mean and dastardly one plays a pirate in the age of Harry Potter and all types of violent video games, unless, of course, they have parents with eyes in the backs of their heads.

"The thing is, in order for the character of a villain to work, there also has to be hero," Pasternak said. "That's how Stache and Peter come together."

In the case of "Peter and the Starcatcher," the hero is the young boy, Peter, also known as just, Boy, who along with his friends, Molly Aster and the Lost Boys, get into a battle of wits with Black Stache to keep a treasure out of Stache's grubby hands so they can save the world.

"Kids are exposed to a lot more than they used to be, or at least at an earlier age," Pasternak said, "and a lot more brutality. But I don't know if I have an opinion on its lasting effect. I actually haven't given it much thought. In the modality we are dealing with in this play, we are working with archetypes. Stache wants to be mean, but isn't."

"The form of this play is a lot like Shakespeare. It's my favorite way of playing. The audience functions as the last actor to join the play and you never know how well they know their part. So how the actors on stage and the people in the audience connect



Actor Charles Pasternak as Black Stache, the charming villain in *Peter and the Starcatchers*

is important to making the whole thing work. You constantly have an ear listening intently to the audience. You take their temperature. It's important to know if they are quiet because they are totally involved with you, or you have completely lost them. It's the joy of this kind of piece, just as it is with Shakespeare."

There's not much chance of losing the audience at performances of "Peter and the Starcatcher" because it's based on the 2006 children's novel of the same name, written by Pulitzer Prize winning humorist Dave Barry, who certainly knows a thing or two about how to grab an audience, and

his writing partner, Ridley Pearson.

"Working on this show is a huge undertaking and a true delight," said director Casey Sams in a press release about the play. "The script is an unabashed celebration of youth, with all its joys and challenges, and it invites the actors to be outrageously playful and imaginative. But within all that outrageousness, the story has a beautiful open-hearted quality that will leave audiences dewy-eyed, even as they burst out laughing,"

Sams is head of Undergraduate Studies in Theatre at UT. Her work involves both undergraduate and graduate programs teaching Movement and Acting. In addition to her work at UT she also directs, choreographs, or is the movement coach for theater productions across the country.

Terry Silver-Alford, also a member of the UT Theater faculty and who teaches Musical Theater Performance, Introduction to the Theater and Acting, is the musical director for "Peter and the Starcatcher." Like Sams, he also works on productions at theaters across the country.

Playing Peter/Boy, in this production, is visiting guest artist, Jason Edward Cook.

The UT Theater department professionals and local professionals known to the play-going Knoxville community include David Brian Alley, who plays Smee; Terry Weber, who plays the roles of Mrs. Bumbrake and Teacher; Doug James, who plays Alf; Robert Parker Jenkins, who plays Ted; and Mark Jennings, who plays Captain Scott. All, except Jennings, are also part of the ensemble characters.

Graduate and undergraduate theater students Jeff Dickamore, Aaron Orlov, Jude Carl Vincent, Jackson Burnette, Ellen Nikbakht and Keegan Tucker also have roles in the play.

Preview performances, the opportunity for actors to get a sense of what “Peter” audiences will be like, what they respond to and what they don’t, begin tonight and tomorrow, Aug. 30-31.

If there’s any tweaking to be done, it will have to be quick, because “Peter and the Starcatchers” officially opens Friday night, Sept. 1 and runs through Sept. 17. Performances begin at 7:30 p.m., except the matinee performance at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 10, which will be open captioned for the hearing impaired.

For tickets, call the Clarence Brown Theatre box office at 865-974-5161, Knoxville Tickets at 865-656-4444, or order online around the clock at www.clarencebrowntheatre.com. UT faculty and staff, senior citizens, military personnel, children and students receive price discounts.

The play is suitable for ages 10 and up, no matter what your real age is.