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## High-flying reunion

"For Peter Pan on Her 70th Birthday" features Forward founders

**BY VICTORIA DAVIS**

NOVEMBER 7, 2019

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## ARTS EVENTS

### Jon Etter

NOV 17, 2019

10:30 AM

**MYSTERY TO ME**

BOOKS KIDS & FAMILY

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### STEM Art & Film Festival

NOV 17, 2019

9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

**MONONA TERRACE**

ART EXHIBITS & EVENTS MOVIES

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VICTORIA DAVIS

**Siblings John (Norman Moses) and Ann (Susan Sweeney) mourn their father's death in Sarah Ruhl's play.**

For the first time, actors are taking flight in Overture's Playhouse, with their eyes focused on that second star to the right. On Nov. 7-24, **Forward Theater Company** presents the Wisconsin premiere of *For Peter Pan on Her 70th Birthday*. It is the first time a flying rig has ever been used in the Playhouse. And it is also a reunion, on stage and off. Four of the founders of the 11-year-

## Harmony Bar Art Show

NOV 17, 2019

11:00 AM - 5:00 PM

**HARMONY BAR**

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HOLIDAYS

## Craig Blietz, S.V. Medaris

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**OVERTURE CENTER-JAMES WATROUS GALLERY  
OF THE WISCONSIN ACADEMY**

ART EXHIBITS & EVENTS

## A Doll's House, Part 2

NOV 17, 2019

1:00 PM

**AMERICAN PLAYERS THEATRE, SPRING GREEN**

ISTHMUS PICKS THEATER & DANCE

## Dark Arts & Crafts & Games

NOV 17, 2019

1:00 PM - 6:00 PM

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old company — Jim Buske, Michael Herold, Celia Klehr and Sam D. White — appear in the show.

*For Peter Pan on Her 70th Birthday* was written by Sarah Ruhl in 2017 as a gift for her mother, Kathleen Kehoe Ruhl, who had played Peter Pan in a children’s theater production in school. Ruhl’s play takes place in Davenport, Iowa, where five siblings have reunited in their hometown to mourn their father’s passing. Ann (Susan Sweeney), the oldest of the siblings, wrestles with the meaning of death and becoming an adult orphan, as memories of playing Peter Pan in her school’s production overlap with the reality she’s experiencing with her now-grown siblings.

“[Ruhl] may have written it as a gift for her mother but, for me, this felt like a gift for audiences,” says director Jennifer Uphoff Gray. “The play is so beautiful and human. It’s about family and about growing up. But it’s also about the magic of theater and the ways in which theater allows you to be imaginative and see your own life through new lenses.”

In some scenes, Ann spars with her three brothers and younger sister about religion, politics and corny carrot jokes. In others, the family is far away in Neverland with Ann (as Peter Pan) sword fighting her brother Jim (Buske), who becomes Captain Hook. The other siblings transform into Wendy (Klehr), Michael (Herold) and John (Norman Moses), embarking on adventures with Pan in pirate ships — which also take flight on stage.

“The playwright, in her notes, talks about how J.M. Barrie dedicated *Peter Pan* to ‘The Five,’ the five Davies siblings,” says Sweeney. “So on a lot of levels, this play is a tribute. It’s a tribute to Sarah’s family, the story of *Peter Pan*, and J.M. Barrie.”

“It’s a much richer and deeper play than we thought it was when we first started rehearsals,” adds Buske. “It’s a very reflective play, even in the Neverland sequences. The siblings have to ask themselves the question, ‘Do I want to stay in Neverland? Or do I want to go home?’”

Though there's plenty of serious themes, *For Peter Pan*, which is fresh off the heels of an Off-Broadway production in New York City, is also filled with fun — from marching bands to pirate brawls and “definitely a lot of flying,” says Gray. As a running joke, the veteran players have lovingly dubbed the play their very own, “Geriatric *Peter Pan*.”

“We’re a family, played by a family,” says White, who plays Father and “an ordinary ghost.”

“To tell this story with some of my closest and dearest friends, some of whom I’ve known for 40 years, it increases the depth of it for us.”

STAGE

FORWARD THEATER



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## COMMENTS

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### For Peter Pan on Her 70th Birthday

Forward Theater: A gathering of siblings reminisce and look at the future (or lack thereof), 11/7-24, Overture Center-Playhouse, at 7:30 pm Wednesdays-Saturdays and 2 pm Sundays, plus 2 pm, 11/16 & 23. \$49-\$20.

NOV 17, 2019, 2:00:00 PM

VICTORIA DAVIS

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ZANE WILLIAMS

## **The odd couple**

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