

Q&A with SOPHIE Playwright & Director Gay Hammond



What do you consider to be the production's biggest challenge?

Having a pirate ship onstage, and finding new and interesting ways to move about on it are definitely the biggest challenges of this show. And the sword-fights.

What about this production excites you the most?

Having a pirate ship onstage. ;-). Usually those aspects of a show which challenge us the most are also the most exciting, because they stretch our creativity and ingenuity, honing our skills (and even creating new ones). I love pirate stories, and I love stories about girls who want adventure -- SOPHIE has all of these things.

What do you hope audiences will take away from the show?

I hope that audiences will take away a sense of love for adventure, and love of home -- and the idea that these two things can coexist! And, as with all WQ shows, I want the audience to feel that each person is uniquely interesting, gifted -- in often surprising ways -- and that it's okay to explore those gifts.

What kind of research went into writing the play? Did any real-life pirates inspire the ones we are going to see onstage?

I read a lot of the pirate lore, exploring particularly Howard Pyle's iconic book of pirates stories, and delving into images of both our expectations of pirates and the more humorous or loving "mythology" of pirates (since real-life pirates were dangerous, murdering thieves, not exactly appropriate for a young audiences play!) Yes, Alvilda the Terrible was a real pirate, and we have also pulled from a variety of countries' depiction of pirates (they weren't just in the Caribbean!) There were Asian pirates, Spanish pirates, Viking pirates, etc.

Why should adults come see the show?

WonderQuest is NEVER just for young audiences! Like the finest traditions of historical TYA, we calibrate our shows so that there is something in them for all -- some jokes or poignant moments are only for the adults watching, others only for 7-year-olds -- but all of it is enjoyable and enriching.

How are you approaching the script, having done the show thirteen years ago? How are you going to make the play fresh?

Well, it was thirteen years ago -- who remembers that? So, it won't be hard to make it new again, to me. ;-). Quite seriously, no production is the same, because the designers bring fresh insight, the cast has a completely different take on the story, and the audiences are always new. That's why theatre is so lovely, its ephemeral, changing nature; its gift to us is in the moment, in the shared breath of each unique performance.