



Pirates, Pixie Dust and Poignancy

Disney's two-disc Platinum edition of *Peter Pan* is just as fresh as it was in 1953, as is the memory of Kathryn Beaumont, the actress who brought Wendy to life.

by Jake Friedman

If you notice something sparkling in DVD stores this month, it's some half-century old pixie dust flying off the shelves as Disney releases a special two-disc edition set of *Peter Pan* featuring digitally remastered video and a new 5.1 enhanced audio.

First released in theaters in 1953, *Peter Pan* is especially noteworthy for being one of the few features to have had all of Walt's esteemed Nine Old Men perform as animation directors. (Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson and Hamilton Luske shared official helming credit.) In addition, while the novelty of television production dispersed Walt's focus towards other media, it was *Peter Pan* that returned his attention to the feature department as it had been prior to World War II, during the making of films like *Snow White* and *Fantasia*. For Walt, *Peter Pan* was one of the stories that personally touched him, and it's no wonder that this creative energy reaches audiences even today.

Special features include a narration in Walt's own words called "Why I Made *Peter Pan*," two featurettes on the making of the film, a look into deleted

storyboard sequences and songs, digital galleries of original art during every stage of production by the likes of David Hall and Mary Blair and a commentary track of interviews with Leonard Maltin, Marc Davis, and performer Kathryn Beaumont, among others.

"It was a wonderful experience working with Walt because he was a hands-on person," says Beaumont today. "He was available, and yet he wasn't intrusive. He might throw out an idea and say, 'Why don't you guys kick it around and see what you come up with?'"

Beaumont had already worked under a MGM contract before arriving at the Disney studios, where she became a voice actress and acting model for both *Alice In Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*'s Wendy. She recalls, "When I got to the Disney studios I found that it was a very relaxed place to work, people really cared about what they were doing, and there was no direction from the head saying, 'This is the way I want it; let's do it this way.'"

During the making of the film, Beaumont was invited by the artists to witness every stage of production, from storyboards to



Kathryn Beaumont

final animation. "I was able to sit and observe this creativity that was going on," she says. "Walt would sometimes be in the storyboard conferences, with the directors and writers, and what

I saw was people who were deciding together what might work best for that particular scene. There was no rank; it was always cooperative, and it fascinated me to see it going on."

The film may hold up with the help of its strong storytelling and animation, but actor Hans Conried still steals the show as Captain Hook. "At that time we all did the recording together," says Beaumont, "so it was a nice feel because you could play with the other actors and it was more natural. And working with Hans Conried was such a treat because I was a huge fan and recognized his voice so well."

Being the animators' model for Wendy was also an experience that has stayed with Beaumont. "You see a particular sight or piece of action in the film, and it right away brings back the memory of what you did and what happened on the live-action stage," she says. "The time when Wendy was in the bedroom during the business with the shadow—I can remember going through those motions without hardly any set. The only thing that might be there would be boxes or stepping stairs. You just get these mental images when you actually see something happening in the film."

Today, Kathryn Beaumont is a retired elementary school teacher living in Southern California, although in recent years she has revived her vocal roles for the rides and parades at the theme parks. In 1998 she received a Disney Legend award for her work, though perhaps a statuette cannot hold a candle to the experience of working with Walt himself. "I feel so blessed that I have the opportunity to say that I knew him," she admits. "Not everybody can say that." ■

Disney Home Entertainment releases the special 2-disc Platinum Edition of *Peter Pan* in stores on March 6 (\$29.99).