



SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES Presents

in association with TSG Entertainment

a Department of Motion Pictures / Journeyman Pictures production

WENDY

Devin France
Yashua Mack
Gage Naquin
Gavin Naquin
Ahmad Cage
Krzysztof Meyn
Romyri Ross

Directed by.....Benh Zeitlin
Written byBenh Zeitlin & Eliza Zeitlin
Produced byBecky Glupczynski
.....Dan Janvey
.....Paul Mezey
.....Josh Penn
Executive Producers.....Michael Gottwald
.....Nathan Harrison
Director of Photography.....Sturla Brandth Grøvlen, DFF
Production Designer.....Eliza Zeitlin
Edited by.....Affonso Gonçalves, ACE
.....Scott Cummings
Music by.....Dan Romer & Benh Zeitlin
Costume Designer.....Stacy Jansen
Casting by.....Jesy Rae Buhl

<http://www.foxsearchlight.com/press>

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WENDY

This classic story of Peter Pan is wildly reimagined in this ragtag epic from Benh Zeitlin, director of *BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD*. Lost on a mysterious island where aging and time have come unglued, Wendy must fight to save her family, her freedom, and the joyous spirit of youth from the deadly peril of growing up.

Searchlight Pictures presents, in association with TSG Entertainment, A Department of Motion Pictures/ Journeyman Pictures, **WENDY** and its stunning cast of first-time young actors, headlined by Devin France in the title role of Wendy.

The film is directed by Benh Zeitlin with the written by Zeitlin & Eliza Zeitlin. The producers are Becky Glupczynski, Dan Janvey, Paul Mezey and Josh Penn. The filmmaking team includes director of photography Sturla Brandth Grøvlen, DFF, production designer Eliza Zeitlin, editors Affonso Gonçalves, ACE and Scott Cummings, music by Dan Romer & Benh Zeitlin and costume designer Stacy Jansen.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

On every birthday of our childhoods, my sister Eliza and I wished as we blew out the candles that we would never grow up. We were terrified of our older selves and desperate to determine what kind of loss turns kids into grown-ups, before it was too late, and that door closed forever. From those early days we were visited by the dream of Peter Pan, the boy for whom fun, freedom and adventure stretch into infinity. In many ways, we ran from the specter of lost childhood by modeling our lives on his - dodging structure and responsibility at every turn, creating a band of lost boys who lived for adventure through our films and art projects.

*In 2012 things began to change. Members of our fearless band of misfits had passed away, and others had drifted into new dreams of families, careers, working plumbing... Then like a bolt of lightning the outside world came crashing into our Neverland with the success of *Beasts of the Southern Wild*. It was clear that the way we lived and made films was about to change forever. The lost boys were going to grow up whether we liked it or not, and in the days that followed, it hit me that it was time to tell the story we'd always dreamed about. Only it wasn't Peter's. Ours was to be the tale of the one who experienced the Neverland but had to leave it behind: the story of Wendy.*

Through Wendy's story we would investigate the true nature of aging. Not the changes to our bodies, but the erosion of the spirit that happens only when joy, wonder and hope are lost. How could we grow up and never lose our freedom? This question became the guiding force for what became a seven-year journey through the trials of Neverland.

We were driven by a conviction that we all have as children: you can be anything you want to be, and anything is possible. But that beautiful concept is chipped away as we grow. With each failure, disappointment, and compromise we're taught to accept the limitations of who we are, what we're capable of and what can happen in the world. Our film was created in utter defiance toward that notion. We structured our production to fly against every tenet of practical filmmaking; we combined non-professional actors, adventurous children, unreachable locations on remote islands, a thirty-foot underwater sea creature, a sailing sunken ship, and forged an adventure as grand as anything that Peter could ever dream of.

We decided to strip away the elements of the myth that distanced us from universal reality of this struggle. The film had to be about confronting the most difficult questions in life, not escaping from them. Fairy magic and flying would be replaced with wonders of nature, and monstrous freight trains. The dirt, the sweat, the bugs all would be real to bring our audiences back to a time when there was no greater thrill than getting filthy doing something you weren't supposed to.

As we dove into all the lore surrounding Peter and Wendy, we realized that the story we had dreamed of all

these years was not based on any of the many films about them, or even the original literature. It was the core spirit of these characters that had taken on a life of their own in us, and part of our mission became to liberate them from their deeply problematic histories. Almost every iteration of the story was bogged down by racist and sexist archetypes, headlined by the character of Wendy who heretofore existed only to mend clothes, tend the home, and prove to the wide-eyed children of the world that adventure is meant for boys alone while girls watch from the sidelines. Our version of the story needed a Wendy that would help us forget all the others -- one who is strong, wild, brave, profoundly wise and unshakably committed to her beliefs. She would attack obstacles with love and sweetness which would be a power that allowed her to conquer the perils of Neverland, rather than a weakness that drove her from it.

Peter needed to be re-mythed as well. His lot in history had been to be portrayed as a pre-teen (or adult woman) British aristocrat prancing through a colonialist vision of the Caribbean islands, willfully ignorant that all the ladies were just trying to get a kiss from him. Our Peter had to be a real child for whom joy and play rule every moment, frozen at that delicate age just before you accept that with total freedom comes total loneliness. He had to be from his place, and deeply connected to his natural environment. He had to have a strength and a spirit that could never be fully acted, particularly by someone that young. Finding our Peter Pan would mean looking for a child who deeply loved and understood the natural world, and who had the complexity and intelligence to craft an evolving character around a seemingly out of control six-year-old boy.

*Looking back at the naive defiance with which I launched everyone I know into the wild ride that was **WENDY**, it's hard not to second guess how much easier it could have been, or how long ago it would have been completed if we'd taken a sane approach to our story. But in making the film the way we did, we discovered that growing up can mean living the stories you could only imagine as a child. The games that Eliza and I played as kids in cardboard boxes on the sidewalks and alleyways of Queens have all become realities, full of animal friends, pirate ships, magic islands, miracles and high adventure. Wendy taught us to look toward our older futures with joy and wonder we thought was reserved for the very young. In the end, we have loved growing up with this film, and managed to do so with the tattered flag of anything-is-possible still flying high over our ship. We hope that for those who see her and believe in her, Wendy gives courage and wisdom to laugh in the face of everything that life tries to take from us as our number goes up and up.*

- Benh Zeitlin, 1.10.2020

The Vision and Inspiration for WENDY

*“All children grow up.
For most it just happens, like a change in the weather.
But some, the wild ones,
The ones with a light in their eye...escape.”*

For his follow-up to the critically acclaimed and Oscar® nominated 2012 feature BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD, director Benh Zeitlin wanted to dig into a mythology that had captivated him as a child.

Zeitlin’s naturalistic and mythological film tells the story of a group of children from different worlds fighting to maintain their grip on freedom and joy as the imminent catastrophe of growing older descends upon them.

Producer Paul Mezey (BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD, ANOTHER EARTH, MARIA FULL OF GRACE) connected instantly to the themes Zeitlin wanted to explore; childhood exuberance and “moving through the world with wonder and joy. And when that collides with a sense of responsibility, how do you continue to live a joyful life and embrace the world with a sense of wonder?” asks Mezey.

Knowing that Zeitlin had a non-negotiable edict that the film *not* be a re-telling of an existing mythology; rather, a wholesale re-invention, was comforting to his producing team.

In keeping with his vision of a dreamy, yet appropriately emotionally complex narrative, Benh and Eliza Zeitlin had to ask themselves a series of practical questions: What if Peter Pan *were* real? For example, how would he kidnap these children, and what is the landscape in which he would live?

“We talked about the moments where you fundamentally feel like you grow up, the moment when you realize that Santa Claus isn't real-that sometimes as soon as you stop believing in this thing, it doesn't exist. And then you grow older because you start to let go of things and your youth sort of escapes.”

Eliza adds, “Benh and I have collaborated on art projects all our lives, it is the way we have always played together. While writing the screenplay for “Wendy,” I was living on our family farm in South Carolina, caring for our nearly 100-year-old Grandfather. Benh

was living in New Orleans, and we e-mailed the script back and forth, writing in different colors. Several times, we wrote almost identical scenes without knowing it. When we disagree, we dissect the reasons for the conflict, find the path forward, and land on a solution that is better than what either would have devised on our own.”

Abandoning the conceit of author J.M. Barrie’s fairy dust-laden depiction of “Neverland” meant Zeitlin could aspire to an earthier, more volatile idea of how Peter’s wildness could exist in the world.

“For example, I felt Peter should be like a volcano, the ultimate symbol of volatility, but also one of youth, as volcanoes symbolize the earth being born again and again,” he says. “We wanted to find magic in organic things.”

To execute such a layered amalgam of organically-rooted and fantastical elements, Zeitlin and his producers knew they had to assemble a team of collaborators who’d be game to tackle the project.

Penn says because they’d once again be working with non-actors, and location needs would take them to the far reaches of the Caribbean, they didn’t hesitate to call upon talent with whom they’d previously worked.

“It was a lot of the same people—and the same kind of spirit—we had on BEASTS,” says producer Josh Penn (BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD, MONSTERS AND MEN, CONTEMPORARY COLOR). “We also spent probably close to a year searching the world looking for our key crew. I don’t know if a lot of people would have been up for the adventure or the way we like to work.”

Adventures in Casting: The Search for Wendy and Peter

As with BEASTS, for which he cast breakout 10-year-old actress Quvenzhané Wallis, (a breakout star who received a Best Actress Oscar nomination for the role), and her co-star Dwight Henry, Zeitlin’s vision hinged again on using performers who had never acted before. “The goal was to bring a sense of realism to these mythic figures” says Zeitlin. “Although no one is playing themselves in the film, everyone in the cast had an inner spirit

that spoke to the wildness of their characters. Both with the adults and children in the film, they had to be people who, given the choice to follow Peter to Neverland, would say “yes.”

Knowing this quality would be near impossible to find in professional actors of any age, the casting team embarked on a grassroots casting search of South Louisiana, canvassing schools, community centers and churches to encourage people who had never considered acting before to audition for roles in the film.

Zeitlin describes Devin France, the heroine of **WENDY**, as “very ferocious and the most sweet-hearted child we’d ever seen. And those qualities weren’t two sides of her, they came at you simultaneously. I’d never met anyone like her.” The team’s first meeting with the Louisiana native at a 2015 casting call in South Lafourche Library was a game changer that set the film in motion. They had already seen approximately 1,500 kids for the role.

“She was incredibly open and vulnerable and bursting with curiosity,” says Zeitlin. Her imagination would light her up from within and you could see how much it thrilled her to make believe. I knew it was going to be the most challenging child performance I’d ever had to direct and beyond her extraordinary intelligence and her mind-boggling talent, it was seeing the visceral joy she got from acting that convinced me she was collaborator we were destined to find for Wendy.”

France describes hearing that she got the part: “I went to my grandpa’s house for crawfish. We’re all sitting around eating and my mom goes, ‘Hey D, want to know something? You got the lead role in the movie.’ Everyone starts clapping. I’m like ‘Wait, what?’ I started jumping on the trampoline with my cousin. I threw him in the air. I was just so happy.”

France says she’d dreamed of being an actor but surprised even herself with how well she effortlessly channeled Wendy. “I’ve never been this open in my life, so I guess I am like Wendy a little bit. She’s brave, she’s fierce and won’t give up no matter what.”

The road to finding Peter began in 2013 when Zeitlin arrived on the island of Montserrat, a mountainous Caribbean island in the West Indies, located 307 miles southeast of Puerto Rico and home to the still active Soufriere Hills Volcano (which caused two-thirds of the island to be evacuated from 1995 – 2000). There he met local naturalist Philemon ‘Mappie’ Murrain (an associate producer on the film). “When I met Mappie I told

him I was hoping to explore the volcano and the uninhabited areas of the island but had been told they were impossible to access. He kind of laughed and said, 'meet me at the gas station, 5 a.m.'" Over several years the two became close friends and Murrain introduced Zeitlin to the locations that would define Wendy's Neverland. "We'd be out exploring for days on end talking about his childhood hunting, fishing, cooking from ingredients found in the forest," say Zeitlin. "His experience brought a reality to how Peter and the Lost Boys would be surviving in the wild. It was in these conversations I realized we had to find a child who had this level of connection to the specific environment where we'd be shooting the film. Peter would have lived there for hundreds of years and would be able to move through these treacherous landscapes with fearlessness and ease."

But after an exhaustive search of the region, the team was on the verge of giving up and returning to the States to re-think the role. "It was honestly incredibly difficult to find children that still had a passion for playing outside. We consistently found that kids' imaginations were dominated by technology and whatever they were experiencing on their phones," say Zeitlin. "Then one night we were talking over our plight with Anderson T. Andrew (a local filmmaker and production manager on the film), and he said, 'You're gonna find him.' The next day he brought them to the Nyahbinghi Rastafari compound situated in the forest off a dirt road in the neighboring island of Antigua. "As we drove into the camp, we look out at a group of children charging barefoot through the forest, flying through the upper branches of the trees, it was unlike anything we'd seen."

After negotiating an audition with the leader of the camp they met a five-year-old child who would once again change the project forever. "The last kid we auditioned was younger than anyone we'd considered for the role" says Zeitlin. "He has this sparkle of mischief in his eyes that was as dangerous as it was joyful. As he was giving us a tour of his best hiding spots around the compound, I got that crazy feeling that I'd just met Peter Pan. Still, given his age I thought there was no way he could actually play the part. We decided to try an acting game with all the kids. Out of nowhere Yash dropped into character and improvised a scene with a poise and intensity it takes people years to learn. My heart just started pounding out of my chest. It was several months before we made the decision but right there, I knew, it's him. We're making a movie."

In the coming months the rest of the kid gang of the film were assembled in the small towns and bayous of South Louisiana. Expert hunters and hilarious comic duo Gavin and Gage Naquin were cast as Wendy's twin brothers. A trio of wildly imaginative troublemakers (Ahmad Cage, Krzysztof Mehn, and Romyri Ross) were selected to play Peter's band of Lost Boys. Each character was reinvented in the script based on extensive workshops with the children. "None of the kids necessary looked, spoke or thought like the children we'd written. Really, Eliza and I discovered who Peter, the Darlings and the Lost Boys were as each child met each child in the world. Through a long process of collaborations and script revisions, we are sculpting their characters to behave in ways they could relate to." Through this multi-year process the kids learned how to act, navigate the unique environments of Neverland, and come together as tight-knit family that would embark on the adventure of a lifetime.

***Between Two Worlds:
From Louisiana to Neverland***

*"Remember that voice in your head?
The one that says 'Sneak Away! Into the night!'
Here is the place it comes from."*

Zeitlin explains his attraction to filming in Louisiana, where he also shot BEASTS, in the simplest of terms.

"I shoot in Louisiana because it's my home," says the New York native, who moved to New Orleans to live full-time in 2006. "Part of the reason I'm stuck here is because I'm endlessly inspired by people and places, I meet every day. There are so many extraordinary, talented characters and strange, otherworldly places. At the rate I'm going I'm gonna need several lives just to tell all the stories I get just from walking down the street every day."

Key to bringing the narrative of **WENDY** to life was navigating the logistics of how she and her brothers are transported to Peter's world. Says Zeitlin: "For children watching the film, I wanted the Darlings' escape to feel within reach. Flying is one of the first things in life you realize you can't do, and with the way kids adventure movies are now being

made in entirely computer-generated environments, floating out the window felt too safe. I wanted Wendy's escape from the world to feel real."

The team asked themselves, "What was the bravest, most thrilling thing our kids could actually do?" In collaboration with an extraordinary stunt and safety team headed by François Coetzer, it was decided that Peter would lure Wendy and brothers out of their bedroom—which sits in an apartment located above their mother's diner—and leap onto the roof of a passing train.

"One of the most haunting things about New Orleans and the whole region is that it's where many of the national train lines converge. Freight is being moved from the river onto the land and the trains perform all these strange movements that constantly disrupt your life. Deep in the night you'll hear clanging crossing bells, screaming horns and the rumble of these ancient metal behemoths lumbering around. Where are they all going?" For Wendy, a little girl living on the outskirts of the New Orleans, these would be the portal to another world.

Producer Josh Penn says it was clear early on that the logistics of shooting on public tracks and trains offered too many challenges. "We found an incredible organization called Louisiana Steam Train Association, which restores old antique trains, and they had their own track," he says.

Continues Zeitlin, "So we built the Darling's Diner set on their 'stretch track' that they could control. It was from there that we filmed the bulk of our train material, and then filled in the world of the trains on the rail bridges around the Bonnet Carre Spillway, where the Amtrak Train cuts through the swamp on the outskirts of the city."

Still, the most daunting feat of the 66-day **WENDY** shoot was navigating volatile, inaccessible settings for the children's adventure through Neverland. "We needed locations and landscapes that were untouched, with no evidence of human habitation," says Zeitlin. "We didn't want to 'build' Neverland. It had to exist. Our characters' playgrounds are trees, oceans, rocks, and ruins. They sleep wherever they end up each night. One game turns into the next and they never stop long enough to actually 'build' something permanent."

On identifying the right place to form the basis of Neverland, Zeitlin says, "It had to start with a volcano." This central story point led him to Montserrat, the most recently

active volcanic island in the West Indies. “As mind-shattering as buried cities and the mountain itself are, I was as struck by the diversity of other landscapes there—lush rainforests, towering cliffs, surreal rock formations in the ocean.”

Zeitlin was also looking for a place that would become a true collaborator on the project. “I always want the culture of my film set to feel like more of a community art project than a regimented film production. There was a genuine enthusiasm on the island about the idea of a movie happening. It had never been done before and I quickly found an incredibly talented community of people who were excited to join our team in dreaming up ways to execute something unprecedented.”

The script was revised to incorporate each new discovery as the team explored mountainous landscapes surrounding the island’s 5000-person population. “Because nothing we were looking at could be synthetic, we had to change the script to adapt to what was there. In many ways it felt like Montserrat was writing our story and as we chased after it with a pen and paper.”

Many of the film’s locations were challenging to access even by expert hikers, never mind with a full-scale film crew. Staircases were built into cliff faces, roads were created through the volcanic wasteland, equipment (and lunch) arrived by zipline into deep valleys, and a fifty-foot steel ship was sunk and then raised off the coast of Antigua where the film’s water locations were shot.

“Every element you see on-screen is a real location,” says Mezey. “When you see a pirate ship on the open ocean, we literally had a heavy piece of steel on the open ocean. Kids are jumping off of it and swimming through the actual hull of the ship. If you see a volcano, it’s because we literally shot at the base of an active volcano. There’s an awesomeness to those moments.”

Adds Penn: “What these kids did day-to-day was incredible. We were shooting really emotional, tough scenes in a pretty dramatic environment. But they had an energy and perseverance that was inspiring. They just kept going for it.”

“The movie feels like a true adventure,” says Janvey. “We worked really hard to create safe shooting conditions, unusual and wild habitats. And that’s quite unusual in movies, especially in children’s movies; to feel extreme adventure. Normally the notion of adventure can be kind of glib or cute.”

“It’s virtually impossible to make a movie set feel like a playground, and still shoot the movie. But we had to show the kids being really, really free,” Zeitlin says. “That’s a big part of what drew us to Wendy, Peter and their story; they live in a state of ultimate freedom that we all want.” In the end, the making of **Wendy** was an adventure every bit as epic and the story itself.

***In His Own Words:
Cinematographer Sturla Brandth Grøvlen on the
Joys of Shooting WENDY***

“I first met Benh via Skype in April of 2016,” says Sturla Brandth Grøvlen (VICTORIA, RAMS, THE DISCOVERY). “He’d seen my work, including my film VICTORIA [which was filmed in one take]. I think that caught his interest. At the time I was working on another movie, but I read **WENDY** and really liked it. I was afraid at first that I couldn’t do it because it collided with another shoot. Then that movie got pushed and I was lucky that the job was still open! So, I went to New Orleans, we did some tests and I moved to the Caribbean to start the shoot.

My overall approach to the film was to keep it simple. I’d seen BEASTS so I knew that Benh basically thinks in sixteen millimeter. Digital was really never a discussion. (*Laughs*) BEASTS is such a strong visual work so I read **WENDY** with that in mind. Then, it was easier for me to understand his vision. I also used his references, which spanned from South Korean action movies to the documentaries from the seventies. He collects a lot of material that he likes.

Everything was filmed with a handheld camera and at the kids’ eye-levels. It’s tricky in the sense that I couldn’t have the camera on my shoulder if I wanted to move around. We’d shoot at hip-level so I had this handle rig that I’d hold so the camera would be eye-level for them. The kids had very strong personalities and were very funny. You have to

work with children on their terms. It can be particularly challenging for the kids—at least at the beginning— to not look at the camera. But they get used to it!

Shooting on sixteen millimeter gives a lot of texture. It also works as a kind of a time-pocket. Sometimes digital can seem too modern, and Benh is very interested in a timeless feel. Sixteen millimeter is richer and has more texture; the grain is dustier. It feels more lived-in, in a way.

We spent time shot listing and storyboarding as much as we could with the limited time we had. From there, I slowly started to define the visual language of the movie. But then we'd come to a location and everything changed because of the weather or the location had literally changed! We definitely fought the elements: When we had to change lenses, a filter or load the camera, we had to go inside a tent to do it because of the dust, sand or the salt. We might have had even bigger problems shooting digitally with a lot of electronics, so film was better to handle these kinds of rough environments.

There's a lot of natural light in the movie. Most of the Neverland scenes used exterior daylight. There were some interiors that we lit a little bit— a bit more extensive for the night shoots in Louisiana— but overall we tried to give the movie as natural a feel as possible.”

***In Her Own Words:
Designer Stacy Jansen on the Art of WENDY'S Costumes***

“Wendy is a young girl who in many ways has the weight of the world on her shoulders,” says Jansen (THE END OF THE TOUR, THE BIRTHDAY CAKE). “She cares a lot for her family but wants to go on an adventure. She wants to be fair, but she wants to be a warrior. And when Wendy gets to Neverland, she gets a taste of that— and a lot of other things she hadn't bargained for.

In creating the kids' wardrobe, we didn't take inspiration from any previous *Peter Pan* stories. In fact, we tried to stay as far away from them as possible. There are a couple references later in the film: for example, one of the Lost Boys wears a bear costume, which alludes to the cartoon version of *Peter Pan*. But overall, for the Neverland costumes, we paid more attention to what the kids were most comfortable in and what they acted the best in.

Every character has a certain look. The palette for the Lost Boys has a lot of jewel tones; things that would pop against the foliage in the Caribbean and the water. And actually, the color palette is very unified across the film, from early scenes in the diner in Louisiana to the island and then back to the diner at the end.

We were working in difficult conditions and very high temperatures. Many days were wet and muddy. The kids wore loose layers of clothing; stuff that could slip on and off and things that they felt comfortable running around in. Creating new costumes with few resources, doing laundry in a cave in the middle of the day because we needed a fresh costume, changing the children out of clothing multiple times a day to maintain continuity or if they got wet—there was a big learning curve for the kids and we all learned together. For me, some of our greatest challenges were also our greatest joys.”

BEHIND THE MUSIC

Dan Romer & Benh Zeitlin:

A Mother’s Song

For Zeitlin, a melody sung by the Lost Boys throughout the film was key to unlocking the world of Neverland. “That song vastly predates the making of the film,” he said. “It’s something that I wrote in the very early stages of the script, just when ideas were floating around and probably at a point in the process where everything else changed, that was the one thing that felt really solid... Just that simple melody really rooted everything we were doing long before we ever started writing the rest of the score.”

“Dan Romer (co-composer) and I got together and flushed it out and locked down the specific tracks for the film. This idea of a lullaby was really important, connecting back to the idea of mothers. And we knew that there were going to be these two central lullabies that define the score. It’s almost like at the beginning of the film, they’re opposing melodies that pull Wendy in different directions.”

BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD was the first film Dan Romer ever scored, and his process with Benh has remained the same since the very beginning. “Benh was the first person I ever scored a feature film with, or a film with period. Whenever we get together to work, it’s always the same: It’s always extremely collaborative, it’s a lot of melody writing

together. We'll sit down at a piano, and I'll play, and we'll both sing together. Benh will play guitar sometimes. It's a lot of us sitting there workshopping and figuring out where melodies are going to go together."

Zeitlin adds, "We also looked to songs that our parents sang to us, particularly my mom sang me to sleep every night when I was a kid and there were these melodies that were very simple. They're Irish and they feel very timeless. When you hear it, you feel like you've heard it before. They are drawn from a very traditional melodic structure and chords but had to both surprise you and also feel like it was something that has always existed."

Romer says he listened to lullabies around the world but was also really drawn to sea shanties: "We were drawing emotionally from sea shanties. They feel a little less American...the main melody is sort of in that sea shanty vein, melodically and harmonically. The rest of the music was meant to stand along with that, that would be our centerpiece and everything else would feel in the same vein. We wanted it to feel like any part of any theme could pop up in any of the others, they are all related in some shape or form."

"I think the other element was expressing Peter in the music and having a much more kinetic, frantic, rambunctious, dangerous feeling. A lot of that came in as we wrote, bringing in percussion, and we did a lot with striking string instruments."

Similarly, Zeitlin and Romer wrote a lot of material that wasn't perfect musically, to express the chaos of Neverland. "There's an element to the score that's trying to express not necessarily what's literally happening, but the way that Wendy experiences what's happening. She has this imagination that's very cinematic. So, we wanted to make the score kind of clunky and organic to also feel really grand in a childish way. A way that feels like how a kid might imagine their own theme music playing, when they're imagining something."

To help create that unique sound, Romer suggested using an unusual instrument: "We used wine glasses throughout the whole score. That's one of our central instruments. I met this guy Johnny at a concert we both played at and showed Benh a video of him playing and he was really excited to do it. We flew this wine glass player down to the studio and recorded the score. You can hit the wine glasses to make them sound like bells, or you can stroke them with your finger to make them sound like a sustained organ. "

Zeitlin finishes, “We brought in a fiddler from Louisiana as well, who plays over a lot of the score, and a lot of steel pan. Not in any way that you would normally hear a steel pan, listening to Caribbean music or anything, but we wanted just a little bit of a flavor of the two worlds of the film, being Wendy's life at home in Louisiana and then instruments from the Caribbean. Those are other elements that we tried to use, to just create a texture that felt connected to both the characters and the world where they come from.”

On the Open Sea: THE CREATION OF THE MOTHER

In crafting the world of **WENDY**, the Zeitlins thought deeply about the enduring appeal of the *Peter Pan* story. “What is it about the myth that makes it this eternal tale that haunts the imaginations of every generation?” said Zeitlin. “Whether or not they even know the story or have ever read the book or have ever seen anything about the actual text of Peter Pan, everybody knows what he means and it's something that people feel very strongly about. So, a lot of what we were doing early on was trying to take the magic of Peter Pan and take it out of a fairy magic world and into a very organic real world; take the magic and make it natural and tangible and connect it to things that we know and understand and feel.”

Benh and Eliza worked together on “The Mother” with a team of miniature-makers led by Jason Hamer (Ghostbusters), and VFX specialists led by Jasper Kidd to create a miniature of the creature to shoot in a tank, and a full-scale version for interactions with the actors.

Says Eliza, “The Mother character was initially conceived as the first creature on earth, the origin of life, a benevolent beast made of sweetness and light hidden deep in the heart of the sea. I was adamant about creating a full-scale puppet, because my process is always guided by the conviction that there is no substitute for the real thing. I wanted the kids to be able to genuinely interact with her. I wanted the audience to be able to believe in the Mother, and I hoped to create something so wondrous and beautiful, you would almost believe that you, too, could somehow remain young forever.”

“One of the most important things we tried to bring in was the concept of your mother, the thing that makes you, and takes care of you when you're in this carefree stage of youth, is a concept we wanted to express in a number of different ways,” says Benh.

“The ways that we came to both “The Mother” and the volcano were similar. The place on earth that's the most young and fresh is a volcano; that's where the earth is being created and formed. Any volcanic region that's active is where things grow in the most wild and passionate way. Life grows on volcanic soil faster and more chaotically than any other place. Then you have this chaotic eruption that make things, it goes back to ideas about the creation of the universe. We wanted to then put something inside of that volcano, and connect it to that ecosystem, connected to humans and animals. “The Mother”, developed into this idea of an elemental goddess that comes up from the center of the earth.”

“The Mother came to protect the one child that was left behind on the island after the volcano, which was Peter who named this magical creature 'Mother,' and made it his protector. Importantly, if you believe in her she will protect you, too. She also came to embody that idea that she's this Goddess of Youth, that you have to have faith in order to remain young eternally, as the kids do,” Benh concludes.

After working for some time on a metal framework, The Zeitlins realized the beauty and majesty of the creature had to do with every part of her moving all the time. She needed to be organic and fluid, so they began working on a softer face that had to be underwater in order to take its shape, almost like a blob fish.

The lighting and “The Mother’s” blood were shot in real life underwater. They used a pyrotechnics group called Coatwolf in Ventura, California to burn a substance called thermite underwater. Zeitlin shot the burning iron as it descends through the water in super slow-motion and then used those glowing rocks to show “The Mother’s” blood, and the glowing laughs she collects from all the children.

The final result is a combination of the miniature made by Jason Hamer, and the full-scale face made by Eliza Zeitlin’s team on the film. Break / Enter and Jasper Kidd brought those elements together, created the environments around her in the water, and reworked a lot of the underwater lighting concepts they designed for the miniature and face.

Swimming with Stingrays to Dodging Volcanoes:

The Very Real Adventures of Making WENDY

In addition to all the incredible core work done on the island of Montserrat, filming of **WENDY** ultimately took production all over the West Indies.

“We shot on the island of Barbuda and a lot of our water scenes were Antigua, in and around different coral formations— Hell’s Gate, Pearns Point, Stoney Horn,” says Zeitlin.

“Every element you see on-screen is a real location,” says Mezey. “When you see a pirate ship on the open ocean, we literally had a heavy piece of steel on the open ocean. Kids are jumping off of it and swimming through the actual hull of the ship. If you see a volcano, it’s because we literally shot at the base of an active volcano. There’s an awesomeness to those moments.”

Adds Penn: “What these kids did day-to-day was incredible. We were shooting really emotional, tough scenes in a pretty dramatic environment. But they had an energy and perseverance that was inspiring. They just kept going for it.”

“What’s most exciting is that the movie feels like a true adventure,” says Janvey. “We worked really hard to create safe shooting conditions, unusual and wild habitats. I think that when people see it, they’ll feel that these children are actually on an extreme adventure. And that’s quite unusual in movies, especially in children’s movies; to feel real adventure. Normally the notion of adventure can be kind of glib or cute.”

“It’s challenging to make a movie set feel like a playground, and still shoot the movie. But we wanted to show the kids being really, really free,” he says. “That’s a big part of what drew us to Peter and this story; that he lives in a state of ultimate freedom.”

Concludes Eliza Zeitlin, “On every birthday of my childhood, I wished as I blew out the candles to never grow up. I felt the urgent need to discover what loss makes adults of children, before it was too late and that door closed forever. As I grew, I discovered that growing up simply means that you can live the stories you could only imagine as a child. The games that Benh and I played as kids in cardboard boxes on the sidewalks and alleyways of Queens have all become realities, full of animal friends, pirate ships, magic islands, miracles and high adventure.”

WENDY'S young stars reflect on some of their most exhilarating moments on set:



Devin France (“Wendy”) “I deeply enjoyed working with Benh. He’s a really great guy with an open heart.”



Gage Naquin (“Douglas”) “It was good, but I had some tough days where I just had enough. The places I went to are so awesome I wish I can go there again. Working with the kids well that was ok because some days it’s fun and others I just want to be by myself.”



Gavin Naquin (“James”) “It was fun because it is a new experience. I thought it was really fun flying on the airplane traveling to all of the new places that I’ve never been before. Working with Benh and other kids was fun especially when it was a little group.”



Ahmad Cage (“Sweet Heavy”) “My experience with Benh and the other kids was an adventure. We traveled to different places like New Mexico, Antigua and Montserrat. It would be something I would like to do again.”



Krzysztof Meyn (“Thomas”) “The making of **Wendy** was an amazing experience for me. My favorite part of Antigua Montserrat and Mexico are the amazing views. I like everything about Benh. He is very funny, creative and takes a lot of time with all of us. I had fun working with all the kids, especially Ahmad - we have become good friends and do a lot of vacationing together.”



Romyri Ross (“Cudjoe Head”) “My experience working on the film was extraordinary. I got to be Cudjoe Head, live in a world without parents, and do whatever I wanted. Traveling to Antigua, and Mexico was a great experience. I got to fly an airplane that seated 6 to 8 people. The beaches were beautiful, and the Caribbean people were nice. Working with Benh was an experience I will never forget. He made acting fun, exciting, and rewarding. It was nice working with the other kids and playing with the other kids.

*“When the first child laughed for the first time,
the sound broke into a million glowing pieces,
and the Mother rose up from the center of the earth to watch over them.
She was always here and always will be.
And long as you believe in her, you will never, ever grow up.”*