

Island harpist composes, plays for silent film

By **ERIC HORSTING**
Arts Editor

Vashon harpist and cinephile Leslie McMichael has been commissioned by Seattle's Northwest Film Forum to compose and perform a new musical score for the 1924 silent version of "Peter Pan."

McMichael's score for electric, celtic and concert harp will run at 7 p.m. each evening from Friday through Sunday, May 18 to 20 at Northwest Film Forum, 1515 12th Avenue, Seattle. Tickets are on sale now at <http://nwfilmforum.org> or 800-838-3006.

McMichael has also been asked to perform the score in June at Los Angeles' prestigious REDCAT (Roy and Edna Disney Calarts Theatre) as part of the second annual REDCAT International Children's Film Festival. Performance dates for Los Angeles are tentatively set for June 2 and 3.

Says Liz Shepherd, Vashon resident and curator for the Northwest Film Forum and REDCAT presentations, "Leslie was such a natural choice for scoring 'Peter Pan.' Everyone on Vashon knows that Leslie is one of the guiding lights behind the Vashon Film Society. I thought, 'Why not combine her love of film and her genius on the harp?'"

Shepherd hopes to bring McMichael's accompaniment for "Peter Pan" to Vashon within the year.

McMichael founded the harp department at the Suzuki Institute of Seattle and now directs three independent Suzuki harp programs in the greater Seattle area.

She also co-founded the Vashon Island Harp School. Having recorded traditional music for lever harp and original songs on her electric harp, McMichael says she takes great delight in presenting harpists and harp music in unusual situations.

The film version of "Peter Pan" that McMichael scored was directed by American Herbert Brenon in 1924, and it has a fascinating history. J.M. Barrie insisted on handpicking the star of the first-ever film version of his famous play.

After viewing screen tests by Gloria Swanson, Mary Pickford and Lillian Gish, Barrie chose Betty Bronson, an unknown and inexperienced teenager from New Jersey, to play the part of Peter Pan.

Bronson's glowing, lithe performance was almost lost to history when Paramount misplaced the film in the late 1920s. Thanks to a suspenseful and brilliant rescue and restoration, this long-lost interpretation of "Peter Pan" is once again thrilling audiences both young and old. Anna May Wong joins the cast as Tiger Lily and Ernest Torrence (best known for his hilarious portrayal of Buster Keaton's father in "Steamboat Bill, Jr.) as Captain Hook.

Says Gary Morris of "Bright Lights Film Journal," "Bronson literally soars in the title role, beautifully capturing the character's alternating strains of puckishness, petulance and occasional melancholy at the prospect of growing up.



Courtesy photo

Islander Leslie McMichael, who loves films and harps, has composed a score for the silent film version of "Peter Pan."