

## J.M. Barrie Shivers Through 'Mary Rose'

By ERIN McCLAM - AP National Writer

Opie, I've a feeling we're not in Mayberry anymore.

What is it with the redheaded daughters of Ron Howard? First there was Bryce Dallas Howard, splashing about as a nymph last year in the M. Night Shyamalan thriller "Lady in the Water."

Now her little sister, Paige, tries her hand at the supernatural, making her professional stage debut off-Broadway in the Vineyard Theatre's stirring production of "Mary Rose," a ghost story that explores the unyielding passage of time.

This is the first major U.S. revival in half a century for "Mary Rose," first performed in 1920 and written by J.M. Barrie, who also wrote "Peter Pan." And you wonder what took so long. The play is alternately creepy and touching, and its flourishes of humor still seem fresh.

Here it gets considerable design help: Obadiah Eaves' sound design is perfectly subtle, and James Schuette's single-room set has a claustrophobic feel that by itself ratchets up the suspense.

The place is accurately described by one character as "shiversome," and the same might be said for the play. We know almost immediately that there's something spooky, something ethereal, about the story. Director Tina Landau has the narrator, played by Keir Dullea of "2001: A Space Odyssey," lurking on stage even before the house lights go down.

Actually Dullea does quite a bit of lurking - in a back corner of the room, in a chair just off stage - when he's not threading together the story, which springs from the mysterious disappearance and equally unexplained reappearance of a girl on an island.

The girl is Mary Rose, played by Howard, and she has no memory of her three-week vanishing act on the Scottish isle. The episode sets up powerful questions of love, loss and the changing and unchanging ways we look at the people we care about.

There are brighter spots: Michael Countryman and Tom Riis Farrell have two very funny scenes, years apart in the story, as a couple of grouchy, bickering friends whose admiration for each other shines through in spite of themselves.

But the play itself, set to play the Vineyard through March 18, shines brightest of all. It's said that Alfred Hitchcock, the master of suspense himself, was influenced, perhaps even obsessed, with "Mary Rose." It's easy to see why.

