



## **ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION**

**NAME OF COMPANY:** **AMATEUR PLAYERS OF SHERBORNE**

**NAME OF PRODUCTION:** **'A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM'**

**VENUE:** Sherborne Studio Theatre

**DATE:** Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2018

**ADJUDICATOR:** Caroline Joy

It was wonderful to have the opportunity to travel to Sherborne on a Midsummer Night's Eve and watch Amateur Players of Sherborne perform their production of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.'

The minimalist white set (construction by Adrian Hole and Kelvin Whittaker) was extremely effective, reflecting the mystical lighting and creating multi coloured shadows. The lighting bounced off the set creating various locations, stimulating our imaginations - the wood, the palace, the village hall and Mrs Quince's house. The central sliding doors opened to the pomp and ceremony of the palace and welcomed in Titania atop her flowery bed. The levels on stage was used to good effect and provided various seating and sleeping arrangements. The scene changes were swift, and all lighting and sound cues appeared well prompted.

The lighting (Adrian Hole) was superb and emphasised the changing moods and atmosphere, creating a vibrant spectrum of dimensions. The light formed images that at times looked like modern art and thus creating a dream-like sequence of events. There was a good saturation of light on the stage for the Palace scenes that then became more atmospheric as we entered another realm. The use of gobos created a mottled effect on the white background. The various colours being emitted from the cans filled the theatre with rainbow hues as though lots of different sprite like creatures were running amok

around the action. The blue light emphasises the magical Midsummer Moon. The disco lights during the revelries was 'totally bonkers' yet brilliant and added to the humour as Bottom tried to chat up Hippolyta as if in a disco.

The SFX (Mark Lambert) further emphasised the mood and atmosphere and the V/O was used to good effect as Puck played mind games on the lovers. The harp and flute sounds signalled that fairy time was approaching.

The various props were inspired and fun. I loved the back packs and Hermia's yoga mat that she also used as a weapon (how millennial), the shopping trolley, the lollipop stick, the bicycle and the i-phone to check the moonlight on a specific night, the toy dog and the retractable plastic sword. Titania's flowery bed was stunning. It was adored with ivy, an array of colourful flowers and grassy steps that led up to her throne. I also liked the use of the Wiccan style broom as Puck brushed away everything behind the door. The tealights at the end were effective as the characters formed a semi-circle holding them out whilst Puck delivered his final monologue to us.

The wardrobe team was kept busy! The modern costumes under the supervision of Helen Smith (Wardrobe) worked well in this production, consisting of smart suits, evening dresses, hoodies, jogging bottoms ripped jeans and baseball caps. The humans' clothing eventually became tattered and ripped as they chased each other through the woods, showing time had elapsed. These outfits contrasted well with the fairylike and ethereal attire enabling the dream aspect of this play come alive. The Greek masks of the fairies were very effective and gave a pagan feel to the fairy world scenes.

The Mechanicals' attire fleshed out their personalities and we could relate to these people. Bottom with his cords and braces, Mrs Quince with her teacher tweeds and a cheeky whisky, gum chewing Francis Flute, dressed in black, Susan Starveling with her knitting, Cute Lollipop Lady Snug and Snout in his work overalls, constantly eating out of his lunchbox. The Ass's head and hooves were very effective and very sweet. The features had an expression as though he was constantly feeling sorry for himself. The Pyramus and Thisbe costumes added much to the action, which transformed Flute into a passionate and fiery redhead, complete with feather boa, Snug still looked cute as the Lion, Pyramus looked the part in his armour, an upturned colander for his helmet with a plume of feathers shoved in the top, the weight of which resulted in the colander slipping over his eyes adding much humour. The last scenes involved hunting attire with the appropriate waxed jackets, tweeds, wellington boots and caps and finally evening attire consisting of white DJ's and sequins that caught the light and sparkled around the stage as the celebrations in the human world begin.

Director and Stage Designer, John Crabtree, clearly had a strong vision. A martial art fight between Theseus and Hippolyta in Kendo Amour made for a powerful opening scene with some excellent sequence of moves taught by fight arranger, Danny Garbett. I hadn't heard

of Kendo before so I researched it and I understood why Kendo would be appropriate for this fight between Theseus and the Queen of the Amazons. The fact that Kendo requires a lot of mental and physical strength, (the practitioner cannot be led astray by delusions of anger, doubt, fear, or surprise arising from the opponent's actions) echoed the issues arising between Theseus and Hippolyta, Oberon and Titania and the young lovers.

The direction ensured that the central theme of love and its complications held the three different plots together. The link to the three separate plots was the wedding between Theseus, Duke of Athens and Hippolyta the Amazonian Queen. The opening and closing scenes as the fairies transform Theseus and Hippolyta into Oberon and Titania by robing and then disrobing was a magical process to watch and was very effective. Blocking, spacing and stage business was imaginative and creative, and established status amongst the various characters. The movements of the fairy folk was suitably other worldly and disjointed and Puck's movements were sprite like, and full of energy. The chase scenes and slapstick elements were well directed and performed utilising the stage, set and entrances and exits to good effect.

The whole production was peppered with fabulous little touches that drew out the various idiosyncrasies of every character. The interaction and reactions between the characters were well sustained throughout, focusing our attention at all times, such as was the staging and reactions to Bottom's transformation and the flirtation between Titania and Bottom was both very funny and touching. The reaction to the Ass from the fairies portrayed their sense of confusion at this strange beast that ended up in their domain, eventually silencing him by tying up his muzzle with ivy and silently leading him to Titania's flowery abode.

I very much enjoyed the pseudo improvisation during 'Pyramus and Thisbe' playlet as the cues went wrong, the over acting from Bottom, the shambolic blocking, and the exposition courtesy of Bottom. I think this must have been the forerunner for 'The Play That Goes Wrong'. This was original, superbly directed and paced well with spot on comic timing. A highlight has to be Flute's "thanks, mate" as he momentarily came out of character as Pyramus hands Thisbe the sword and told us he is going to "stab self", 'dies' and collapses on Pyramus, only to be violently pushed off so that Bottom could hear the epilogue.

This was a stylish interpretation and the minimalist set enabled the language to take centre stage. Shakespeare's beautiful words created the illusion of romance and magic and were delivered securely and with spontaneity.

The classical music, along with the original music composed and performed and recorded by Annabel Thornton emphasised the ceremony and tradition of the real world and the ethereal and mystical of the Fairy world.

## INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCES

### **Martin Williams - Theseus and Oberon**

Martin possessed a strong resonant voice, with good modulation, clear diction and presence. As Theseus he was charismatic, as Oberon he dominated the stage with an imposing manner. Oberon's fluid, rhythmic movement and body language was hypnotic as though he was conducting the elements. There was some wonderful word play and interaction between Oberon and Puck.

### **Sylvie Lord - Hippolyta and Titania**

Sylvie was mesmerising to watch in both parts. She had stage presence and a secure command of the language. She possessed an earthy sensuality as Titania and strength and composure as Hippolyta. Both were wonderful portrayals in which she was always genuine. Her confident, considered delivery provided a steady presence in contrast to the surrounding midsummer madness.

The relationship between Oberon and Titania was explored. Theirs was a long-standing union in contrast to the new love matches emerging and thus the behaviour portrayed a couple who have lost their way and have forgotten how to communicate, resulting in negligence from Titania and jealousy and anger from Oberon. This was well acted out between Martin and Sylvie.

### **Lucy Bennett – Hermia**

Lucy's interpretation was animated and passionate, with an expressive and secure command of the language and its delivery. Lucy gave a lovely portrait of a headstrong heroine during her elopement, transforming into a fierce fighting machine when confronted by all the craziness happening around her.

### **Rosy Sargent - Helena**

Lucy's body language and facial expressions was perfect for Helena as she moped about, all hard done by. However, although she possessed an articulate and clear voice, I feel that the pace of delivery was too fast as she whizzed through her lines, which meant some of meaning and humour was lost at times.

### **John Crabtree - Egeus**

There was a forceful speech and performance from John as Egeus, Hermia's unsympathetic Father, who set the tone for a talented cast. I particularly enjoyed Egeus's reaction when he was eventually silenced by Theseus. His body remained poised, but his face and eyes told another story!

### **John Robinson - Demetrius**

John's command of the language was apparent and showed us what a solid classical actor he is. Modulation was perfect, and you truly sensed he was reacting physically and emotionally to the words he was speaking, and effectively communicating this to the audience. The potion truly changed his nature from scornful to needy and paranoid emotional wreck, and eventually into a merry and contented young man, thanks to some fairy meddling.

### **Jake Terry – Lysander**

Jake gave a spirited and convincing performance as Lysander and although he started a little fast with delivery, he soon got into the rhythm. Body language and facial expressions emphasised his feelings and he had good comic timing. His obsession with Helena once the potion started to take hold was hilarious as he followed her about like a lost puppy dotting on her obsessively.

### **Rachael Alexander - Puck**

Rachael played the mischievous Puck. She moved lithely, bringing a charismatic and impishly charming energy to this important and rather complex role with excellent delivery. In Act II Puck recapped on the previous events and this was delivered well with excited child-like movements. We were invited into the action courtesy of Puck's asides to the audience and her reactions to the mechanicals. Stage business was sustained throughout and all reactions and interactions were focused and spontaneous.

### **Adrian Harding - Bottom**

Adrian played crude and egotistical Bottom with great energy, expression, clarity and exuberance. His entrance was hysterical as he fist-pumped and high fived his drama group. It was funny to see Bottom constantly question Mrs Quince whilst pinging his braces whenever he became animated. Adrian is a very talented actor with huge stage presence, who was constantly physically and emotionally responding to the text, whether it be a subtle nuanced reaction or a dramatic gesture. Adrian possessed a voice that dominated (even in his Asses mask), and I laughed out loud during Bottom's rhetorical musings as he recounted his dream. This portrayal worked so well because he played this comedic role with authority and pathos and even gave his Bottom charisma! As the Ass, the equine noises whenever Bottom became excited was very funny. This was a very memorable performance.

The other crafts-folk, known as Mechanicals, all supported Bottom and played their various parts with vigour and added much to the fun, particularly in the ridiculous play, 'Pyramus and Thisbe'. In this they all played other characters purposely badly, followed by ungainly dancing.

## **Bev Taylor-Wade - Mrs Quince**

Bev brought so much to the role as Mrs Quince, with some great facial expressions and gestures, who was desperately trying to create something special for the Duke and Hippolyta, knowing that if their offering died a death, so they would too, literally! Bev's reactions to the cast of Mechanicals was superb as she became more and more exacerbated, especially with Bottom. This usually resulted in a swig from her hip flask. Her confidence soon waned when faced with the actual event in front of the palace officials and courtesans. One really rooted for her as she nervously introduced their offering with the prologue.

**Richard Jones** **Francis Flute/Peaseblossom**, Linda Catchpole as **Ms Snug/ Mustardseed**, **Richard Culham** as **Tom Snout/Cobweb**, and **Sarah Webster** as **Susan Starveling/Moth**, all doubled up to play both mechanical and fairy. The Mechanicals worked so well together and had excellent repartee amongst them. The physical comedy amongst the Mechanicals was a joy to watch, with Starveling looking like 'Wee Willy Winkie' with her lantern, thorn bush representation and toy dog, Snug's cute little expressions and the roar as the Lion, Snout and his toolbox who was always taking out a sandwich and just looked pretty chilled about everything, and Francis Flute who had a cool attitude and finds himself having to play Thisbe! As the fairies they were ethereal and mysterious with their lithe and at times disjointed movements, giving a sense of 'other'. The attendants (**Jane Williams** and **Roy Catchpole**) were suitably poised and positioned.

The parts of Pyramus and Thisbe (**Richard Jones**) were played with gusto and I especially enjoyed Flute's acceptance and ultimate enjoyment of portraying the role of the doomed lover, with ladylike expressions and a higher pitched voice. Pyramus (**Adrian Harding**) was mesmerising in his part and one couldn't help feel heartbroken for the poor man. The Wall played by Snout who required more stage time was a wonderful moment in this scene and was played with perfect comic timing. The scene was both funny and tragic.

This was an enchanting show that truly captivated the imagination.

*Many thanks for your kind hospitality and I hope to see you again in the future.*