

Society: Amateur Players of Sherborne
Venue: Sherborne Studio Theatre
Production: A Midsummer Night's Dream
Author: William Shakespeare
Director: John Crabtree
Date: Monday 18th June 2018

SHOW REPORT

It is always a pleasure to witness a production in which the Director (John Crabtree) has a sound understanding of both the play and the characters within it, leaving him free to add his own comic touches and interpretation. There were some lovely comic moments and interesting ideas which enhanced the meaning and delivery of the show. The opening scene, for example, showing Hippolyta (Sylvie Lord) and Theseus (Martin Williams) in combat, lent an aspect to their characters which is often ignored, bringing out the tension between them and demonstrating Hippolyta's being vanquished in arms, but not in spirit. Similarly, the way in which the frustrated Lysander (Jake Terry) was forced into the forest equivalent of sleeping on the sofa provided a modern parallel to an ageless theme and the boyish playground fighting between Lysander and Demetrius (John Robinson) contrasted well with the more sombre fighting of the Duke and Hippolyta.

This was the opening night of a bijou theatre, but technical aspects had not been sacrificed in the conversion of this old chapel: every inch of stage and every possible entrance or exit was utilised; double doors upstage revealed the warriors to great dramatic effect; lighting enhanced the forest scenes and was particularly effective for Oberon's appearance in the second act; sound quality was good and the music (some original) quirky, charming and classical by turns; costumes were rich, bright or rustic, as required, with interesting changes brought about by the fairy-folk; props were excellent, particularly Titania's flow'ry bed and Bottom's (Adrian Harding) mask.

The actors aimed for a high standard, worked well as a team, and although it is not possible to name everyone, the story-telling was excellent, with Demetrius and Lysander in particular conveying the full meaning to the audience; Lysander seemed genuinely intoxicated by the magic, his tearfulness was touching and Demetrius' determination engaging. Puck (Rachael Alexander) was eager, clearly-spoken, and with a flexible physicality which was at times earthy and at others light and ethereal, demonstrating a great sense of

National Operatic and Dramatic Association

15 The Metro Centre, Peterborough PE2 7UH

Tel 01733 374 790 **Fax** 01733 237 286 **Email** info@noda.org.uk **Web** www.noda.org.uk

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mischievous and clear changes of emotion, including joy and guilt. Cheeky and mischievous, with strong eye contact with the audience, it was impossible not to be connected to this character. Her-mia (Lucy Bennett) and Helena (Rosy Sargent) were most convincing as young girls in love and in conflict, speaking clearly and expressing passion, confusion and anger. Oberon and Titania, Theseus and Hippolyta were dignified, regal and powerful characters, and we understood the tensions and attractions between them. The Mechanicals were as quirky and idiosyncratic as their music, serious and yet hilarious, totally inept in their preparations and yet triumphant in their presentation of Pyramus and Thisbe. We laughed at Bottom's antics (and his excellent hee-haw) and pitied his plight in this strong characterisation. There was a very touching and sweet scene as the young couples awaken after Oberon has put right the chaos, which led us towards the wedding and a magical finale, as hand-held candles glimmered and Puck delivered the epilogue.

Congratulations APS - this was an enchanting performance with which to celebrate the opening of the Sherborne Studio Theatre.

Sylvia Coates
NODA Representative

Any observation made by the reviewer is based only on the performance in question. The NODA Representative's intention is to give an objective critique of the production overall and in particular the performance viewed. Any criticism expressed may not be valid at other performances, and is made only to encourage higher standards in Amateur Theatre.

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