

Encore

A true 'Midsummer' delight at Monmouth

David A. Sargent / Special to the Sun Journal

[Encore](#) | Saturday, August 1, 2015

MONMOUTH - Theater at Monmouth is serving up a delightful concoction of controlled chaos in their production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

The performers are superb and the show is packed with hilarious action. It all adds up to a must-see opportunity for fans of Shakespeare's most popular play.

Janis Stevens directs this production, and her 14 years of association with TAM contribute to a staging that is just right for Cumston Hall and its extraordinary 115-year-old opera hall.

There have been many imaginative dramatizations of "Dream" through the years. Among them were casts of 100 or more, musical versions, ballets, and even a Walt Disney animated short with Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Donald and Daisy Duck, and Goofy as Puck.

Stevens, in her program notes, said she wanted to take the play back to "itself" in its intended Athenian woods and palace of Theseus, where the Monmouth production could "let the beauty and magic of the text glimmer in its own light."

Several actors shine brightly in TAM's "Dream."

For sheer comedic energy, Bill Van Horn's portrayal of Bottom, the weaver, is outstanding. Van Horn, associate artistic director and 13-year veteran of TAM's shows, thunders through the role which runs from bluster of a would-be actor in "Dream's" iconic play-within-a-play to a hilarious transformation into a donkey.

Andy Blaustein gives a charmingly vigorous portrayal of Puck, servant to Oberon, king of the fairies.

Special commendation goes to the four lovers, Hermia, Helena, Lysander and Demetrius, around whom the dream-like night in the woods revolves. The roles of all four mesh perfectly as they pursue love through a series of mix-ups when Puck miss-applies the magic of a woodland flower.

Leighton Samuels plays Lysander, and the program also lists him as "fight director." For that responsibility, Samuels, in his second season with TAM, has created remarkable stage action that seems, at times, to defy gravity. In a scene when the four lovers experience total confusion as to whose partner is whose, the intricate encounter ranges from frantic to slow-motion.

Erica Murphy (second season) and Olivia Williamson (first season) give excellent performances as Hermia and Helena. Michael Dix Thomas (second season) is also a standout as Demetrius.

The plot opens in the court of Theseus where Egeus (Jordan Coughtry, first season) pledges his daughter, Hermia, to Demetrius, but she loves Lysander, and Demetrius loves Helena. The four take flight to the woods, and at nightfall, the fairies, under the rule of Oberon (Josh Carpenter, second year, also playing Theseus) and Titania (Nisi Stugis, first season, also playing Hippolyta, Queen of Athens, bring on all kinds of mischief.

Mark S. Cartier, 19 years with TAM, portrays Peter Quince, who, in total exasperation, tries to organize the players in their woodland rehearsal. Fine comedic performances are turned in by the inept players. John Logan (first season) brings on huge laughs in his mostly-pantomime role as a wall. Other roles are well-played by Isabella Coulombe, Anna Doyle, Alan Estes and Marlowe Holden.

Jim Alexander, set designer, and Elizabeth Rocha, costume design, also contribute important skills to this production.

Performed in repertoire, up-coming dates for "A Midsummer Night's Dream" are 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 1; 7 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 2; 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 5; 1 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 6; 7:30 p.m. shows on Aug. 13, 15 and 18; and 1 p.m. on Aug. 23.

Ticket prices range from \$10 to \$30, and \$10 rush tickets are available for every performance to anyone under 30. Discounts are available for groups of 10 or more. For calendar and reservations, go to the Web site at www.theateratmonmouth.org or call the TAM box office at 207-933-9999.