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THEATRE

Review: A Midsummer Night's Dream

Pure enchantment for all ages

by Dorothy Velasco

A Midsummer Night's Dream is always a favorite at the Oregon Shakespearean Festival, not to mention every other Shakespearean festival around the world. In its first Ashland revival since 1979, it contains more than enough fun and magic to draw audiences back yet another time.

The mixed-up romances of Demetrius, Helena, Lysander and Hermia, the fairy world of Titania, Oberon and Puck, and the low class highjinks of Nick Bottom, Peter Quince and their cohorts, are familiar to most of the spectators at Ashland.

We know the play is wonderful, even in high school productions. But in the expert hands of director Pat Patton, a talented cast weaves a joyful spell over the happy audience. The humor is kind, the magic of love is pervasive, and the themes are stated with perfect clarity. Even the youngest children in the audience are totally absorbed by the action.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is

a visual delight, a feast rich enough for the greediest of theatre gluttons. Costume designer Michael Olich and setting and properties designer Jesse Hollis together create a total vision of a fairy world right out of the Arabian Nights. Costumes of real silk flow, glitter and cling as artfully as those in Persian miniatures. The design is not only sumptuous, but touches the core of our imagination. A giant crescent moon and starry background beckon us to another realm and we yearn to go there. The Elizabethan Stage has never looked more beautiful.

All of the acting is beguiling, but Joe Vincent and JoAnn Johnson bring unusual clarity to the troubled relationship between Theseus and Hippolyta. We actually see that relationship develop and deepen, unaided by dialogue. In the fairy world Derrick Lee Weeden is magnetic as Oberon, Sheryl Taub is impetuous but sympathetic as Titania, and Henry Woronicz abandons his usual

heroic roles to play a charmingly exuberant Puck. Barry Kraft is a lovable Nick Bottom in a realistic donkey mask, a man of foolish dreams but not a total fool, and Rex Rabold is a quivering bundle of nerves as Peter Quince.

The four young lovers are charmingly played by Katherine Heasley, Chiron Alston, Jeffrey Nordling and Michelle Morain, who has some funny bits with her glasses.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, seen on a warm summer's night in Ashland, is pure enchantment. For young theatre-goers it's the perfect introduction to Shakespeare. They'll be hooked for life. For older theatre-goers it's the perfect renewal of faith in the magic and beauty of the Bard.

[Dorothy Velasco's reviews can be heard on The Ashland Report produced by D. Roberts and airing on KLCC-FM's Morning Edition and Sunday Morning programs.]

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