

Review of A Midsummer Night's Dream



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"Colourful, exuberant 'Midsummer Night's Dream'." by Avril Silk for remotegoat on 16/06/16



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Outdoor theatre in an English summer requires a special combination of optimism and stoicism. Driving across Somerset to Glastonbury Abbey in torrential rain to see Rain or Shine's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' taxed both qualities to the limit. I am thrilled to say that, in the event, the weather was miraculously kind – and even more **thrilled to say that this exuberant, colourful production was great fun.**

Eight players take on sixteen parts, with some lightning costume changes. I mention them because they were not so much changes as transformations – it's easy enough to throw a cloak over a tunic, but producer Jayne Lloyd's striking costumes were not designed to take the easy way. I thought the fairy costumes were particularly lovely. Jayne also plays Titania and Hippolyta. I enjoyed seeing Hippolyta come to appreciate Anthony Young's kind, wise Theseus, having initially deeply resented being his spoils of war. (As would most women.) I liked her interaction with Hermia, offering solidarity against would-be-tyrants like her father, Egeus, played by Rob Keeves. Rob also plays an energetic, likeable Puck, although I was baffled somewhat by his opening lines which were delivered with a puppy-dog subservience which, thankfully, soon gave way to enthusiasm and enjoyment at the mayhem he and his master set in motion.



The mayhem in question is greatly to be relished. **The hapless lovers, Helena (Pippa Meekings), Lysander (Matt Ferriman), Hermia (Emmeline Braefield) and Demetrius (John-Cooper-Evans) are wonderfully passionate; bewitched, bothered and bewildered before all is made right again.** The very convincing fight between Helena and Hermia is extremely well done. The exceedingly funny opposites, suitors bluff Lysander and foppish Demetrius, use a tiny performance space to comic advantage as they get in on the action. As a wearily love-lorn and clingy Helena, Pippa Meekings plays a blinder – equally matched by Emmeline's Hermia, who goes from soppy to shrewish to splendidly savage before their midsummer's nightmare is ended and true love conquers all. What would they have done with Facebook!



Other highlights of this production are the Mechanicals' rehearsal of 'The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe', and the performance as part of the nuptial celebrations of Theseus and a (thawing) Hippolyta. Matt Ferriman is a beleaguered Peter Quince, faced with a wildly incompetent cast – incompetent, that is, apart from Rob Leetham's excellent Bottom (!), who is, in his own opinion, capable of everything. I won't elaborate more on the Pyramus and Thisbe play, because it contains a most ingenious surprise, except to say that rarely have I enjoyed that scene more. (I also liked Bottom's ad libs to the small children who - aaaargh - were running noisily around the stage towards the end.) The balloons were a welcome addition, and I would use them in other places, I think, as part of the carnival clowning. I even yearned to see a unicycle, and once upon a time I would have paid not to see one, as they used to crop up everywhere...



I enjoyed the sound effects and music, but often they were a bit too subtle and needed a tad more volume. Hard to judge in the open air, I know. Special congratulations to the cast for their audibility.

Director Tom Jordan has given us **a merry romp** and if you missed it at Glastonbury, it is touring right up until the end of August.