

HOT SPRINGS CHILDREN'S  
DANCE THEATRE CO.  
PRESENTS...

WILLIAM  
SHAKESPEARE'S

# *A Midsummer Night's Dream*



## **Study Guide**

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, EDMOND COOPER  
COMPOSER, FELIX MENDELSSOHN

MAY 17<sup>TH</sup> & 18<sup>TH</sup>  
LAKEPOINTE  
CHURCH

MAY 21<sup>ST</sup>  
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# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

May 17 - 21, 2024

**Hot Springs Children's Dance Theatre Company is celebrating our eleventh-year anniversary by bringing A Midsummer Night's Dream back to life! The ballet premiered at Children's Theatre in 2014 during the company's second season.**

## A Brief History

The ballet first premiered during the company's second season in 2014. Amy Bramlett and Matthew Morley danced the leading roles of Titania and Oberon. The ballet was a tremendous success, leading to the inevitable return of the production this season.

## ACT ONE

Our story opens in a forest near Athens on Midsummer's Eve. We first meet the fairies who inhabit the forest: Puck, a mischievous sprite, Oberon, the King of the Fairies, and Titania, the Queen of the Fairies. Oberon and Titania are fighting because Titania has adopted a young human child and Oberon wants the child for himself. Titania refuses to give Oberon the child, so he decides to play a trick on her with Puck's help.

Next, we meet a group of humans who have wandered into the forest from nearby Athens. Hermia and Lysander are in love, but do not have her father's permission to marry. They ask Theseus, the Duke of Athens, to marry them anyway, but he refuses, and so they run off into the woods. Their friends Demetrius and Helena follow them into the woods. Demetrius is infatuated with Hermia and thinks this may be his chance to command her affections. Helena follows him because she is in love with Demetrius and hopes that he will finally notice her. Meanwhile, a weaver named Bottom has entered the forest with his friends, unaware of what is about to befall him.

Oberon sees these humans appear in his domain and decides to intervene, while also playing a trick on his wife. He has Puck bring him a flower pierced by Cupid's arrow, which will cause anyone touched by it to fall in love with the first person they see. Then he commands Puck to use the flower on Demetrius, so that he will fall in love with Helena. Next, he instructs Puck to separate Bottom from his friends, transform his head into that of a donkey, and use the flower on Titania so that she will fall in love with this ridiculous creature. But things do not go quite according to plan: Puck accidentally uses the flower's magic on Lysander rather than Demetrius, causing him to fall in love with Helena. An attempt to fix the situation results in both men loving Helena and leaving poor Hermia alone and confused.

Things go better with Titania, who does indeed fall in love with the donkey-headed Bottom. Oberon appears and releases her from the spell. Titania is so embarrassed that she reconciles with him. As the night continues, the humans fall asleep, allowing Puck to straighten things out. He removes the spell from Lysander, keeps it on Demetrius, and when they awake, all is right again. Hermia and Lysander are in love and Helena finally has Demetrius's love.



## From Shakespeare to Ballet

### **William Shakespeare (1564-1616)**

William Shakespeare, the most influential writer in all English literature, was born in 1564 to a successful middle-class glove-maker in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. Shakespeare attended grammar school, but his formal education proceeded no further. In 1582 he married an older woman, Anne Hathaway, and had three children with her. Around 1590 he left his family behind and traveled to London to work as an actor and playwright. Public and critical success quickly followed, and Shakespeare eventually became the most popular playwright in England and part-owner of the Globe Theater. His career bridged the reigns of Elizabeth I (ruled 1558–1603) and James I (ruled 1603–1625), and he was a favorite of both monarchs. Indeed, James granted Shakespeare's company the greatest possible compliment by bestowing upon its members the title of King's Men. Wealthy and renowned, Shakespeare retired to Stratford-upon-Avon and died in 1616 at the age of fifty-two. At the time of Shakespeare's death, literary luminaries such as Ben Jonson hailed his works as timeless.

Shakespeare's works were collected and printed in various editions in the century following his death, and by the early eighteenth century his reputation as the greatest poet ever to write in English was well established. The unprecedented admiration garnered by his works led to a fierce curiosity about Shakespeare's life, but the lack of biographical information has left many details of Shakespeare's personal history shrouded in mystery. Some people have concluded from this fact that Shakespeare's plays were really written by someone else—Francis Bacon and the Earl of Oxford are the two most popular candidates—but the support for this claim is highly circumstantial, and the theory is not taken seriously by many scholars.

In the absence of credible evidence to the contrary, Shakespeare must be viewed as the author of the thirty-seven plays and 154 sonnets that bear his name. The legacy of this body of work is immense. A number of Shakespeare's plays seem to have transcended even the category of brilliance, becoming so influential as to profoundly affect the course of Western literature and culture ever after.

## Background on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Written in the mid-1590s, likely just before Shakespeare turned to *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of his strangest and most delightful creations, and it marks a departure from his earlier works and from others of the English Renaissance. The play demonstrates both the extent of Shakespeare's learning and the expansiveness of his imagination. The range of references in the play is among its most extraordinary attributes: Shakespeare draws on sources as various as Greek mythology (Theseus, for instance, is loosely based on the Greek hero of the same name, and the play is peppered with references to Greek gods and goddesses); English country fairy lore (the character of Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, was a popular figure in sixteenth-century stories); and the theatrical practices of Shakespeare's London (the craftsmen's play refers to and parodies many conventions of English Renaissance theater, such as men playing the roles of women). Further, many of the characters are drawn from diverse texts: Titania comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Oberon may have been taken from the medieval romance *Huan of Bordeaux*, translated by Lord Berners in the mid-1530s. Unlike the plots of many of Shakespeare's plays, however, the story in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seems not to have been drawn from any particular source but rather to be the original product of the playwright's imagination.

### The Ballet

Several different choreographers have choreographed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the ballet, including George Balanchine in 1962 and Sir Fredrick Ashton in 1964. Much of the plot takes place within a one act ballet. The Hot Springs Children's Dance Theatre production is based on an adaptation of the Ashton version entitled *The Dream*. The Children's Theatre version is specifically generated and inspired for children. We have included a breakdown of the characters and subplots to help assist in following the ballet.

## Character and Subplots of AMSND Fun Facts

### TITANIA: QUEEN OF THE FAIRIES

Titania is obsessed with her recently acquired changeling, a human child stolen away to live among the fairies. Gracious, but stubborn, she is uninterested in reconciling with her estranged husband, Oberon, King of the Fairies.



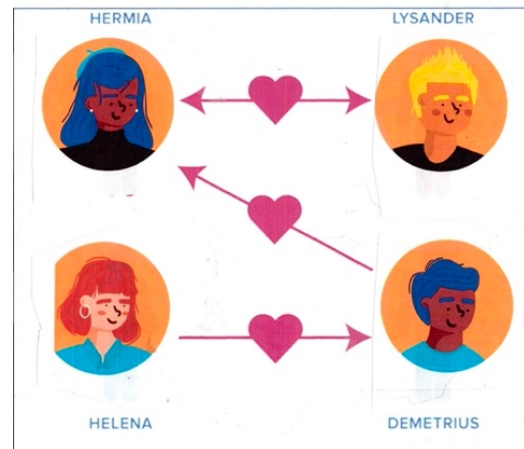
### OBERON: KING OF THE FAIRIES

Oberon is a bit of a troublemaker: when Titania will not let him adopt the young human child, he decides a bit of fun is in order.



## HERMIA, LYSANDER, HELENA, AND DEMETRIUS

These four young people from Athens are amid a complicated love square. Hermia loves Lysander and Lysander loves Hermia. But Helena loves Demetrius, and Demetrius loves Hermia (yes, it is complicated). Once Puck and Oberon get involved and use the magic flower, it only gets more complicated from there.

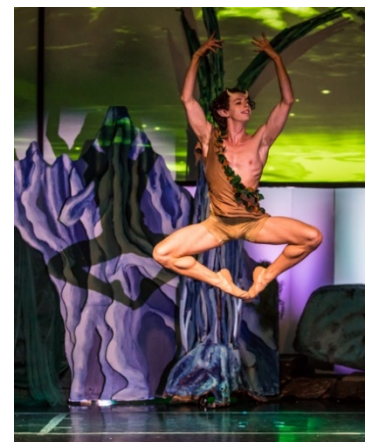


## BOTTOM: THE HUMAN WHO PUCK TURNS INTO A DONKEY

Poor Bottom. Bottom is a weaver who is wandering through the forest with his friends when he gets caught up in forces beyond his control. Puck plays a mean trick and turns Bottom into a donkey. No one asked Bottom if he wanted to be turned into a donkey, but he makes the most of an unpleasant situation and even dances with Titania the Queen of the Fairies before being restored to his proper human form. (Image 5)

## PUCK: KING OBERON'S RIGHT-HAND MAN

Puck loves mischief and is always down for a practical joke. Occasionally, those tricks go awry and then it is up to Puck to find a way to put things right again. Puck uses the magic flower to make people fall in love with the first person that they see. (Image 3)



## MUSICAL SCORE

Felix Mendelssohn is a composer known for his symphonies and concertos—but not his ballets. In fact, he never wrote the music for a ballet, although various choreographers have adapted his works for dance. The music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written as an overture for the play when Mendelssohn was just seventeen, and the rest was composed 16 years later. It was intended as incidental music, or music meant to be played in the background during a play.

The most famous part of the score is the Wedding March, which has had a life of its own ever since Princess Victoria used it for her 1858 wedding. The score is full of delights beyond this familiar tune. It contains several wonderful vocal numbers.

# DURING THE PERFORMANCE

## AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE: PREPARE YOUR STUDENTS FOR THE PERFORMANCE

It takes a lot of people to put on a ballet production. All the people involved in the production work very hard to create a beautiful and exciting performance, but there's one more important role. The audience!

*A live performance is an exciting experience for the audience as well as the performers. The audience should pay close attention to what is happening on stage and participate and applaud at the appropriate times. What are some of the differences between going to the theater to see a live performance and watching a video or going to a movie?*

*What makes a good audience member?*

## DURING THE PERFORMANCE

### Watch the dancers carefully

- Look for movement motifs, familiar ballet steps, impressive jumps, and exciting partnering lifts.
- Think about how the costumes and sets help tell the audience something about the story, idea, or mood of the ballet.
- Consider how the dancers are using movement to express themselves or tell a story.

### Listen to the music

- Clap when the conductor enters.
- Watch the conductor and musicians.
- Listen for your favorite instruments.
- Think about how the music and the choreography on stage work together.

### Clap when you see something you really like

- During a ballet performance, the audience usually claps at the end of a scene or ballet, but the audience can also clap after a difficult sequence of turns, exciting jumps, or when a dancer lifts another dancer high in the air.
- Say "Bravo!" when you see something on stage that is very exciting. Bravo is an Italian word that means "great job!"
- Applaud when the performance is over. This tells the dancers, orchestra, and crew that you appreciate their hard work. Give a standing ovation if you really enjoyed the performance.

### A good audience member will...

- Watch the performance quietly.
- Remain seated during the performance. Do not put your feet on the seats or kick the seat in front of you.
- Use the restroom before the performance. If students need to visit the restroom during the performance, they must be accompanied by a teacher or adult chaperone. An usher will direct you to the nearest restroom. When you wish to return to your seat, an usher will direct you to the safest path back to your seat. For the safety of all patrons, students may not leave their seats without a teacher or adult chaperone.
- Turn off phones and cameras. Absolutely no phone calls, texting, photos, or videos are allowed during the performance.

- Leave food, drinks, chewing gum, and candy in the backpack. Food brought from outside may not be consumed anywhere in the Opera House building.

### AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Think about how the artists used movement, music, costumes, and sets to communicate a story, idea, or feeling to the audience. Talk with a friend, classmate, teacher, or family member about your favorite part of the performance.