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### Shakespeare production a 'Dream'

Montgomery Advertiser - Montgomery, Ala.

Subjects: Sound; Theater

Author: Swafford, Allan

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Start Page: 1

Section: D

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#### Document Text

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Sounds and images add new luster to classic in director's company debut

The Alabama Shakespeare Festival's new production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," as directed by Paul Barnes in his debut with the company, becomes a sensuous feast for the lucky theatergoer.

Spicing with a delicate hand, Barnes ravishes the senses with a banquet of music, sound effects and light, which enhances the play's innate magic. Even the sated theatergoer who greeted with a groan the announcement of yet another "Dream" will find his perhaps overly delicate palate titillated and richly satisfied.

"Dream," one of three plays in which Shakespeare devised his own plot, is a tightly woven mingling of several worlds. The courtly characters -- Theseus and Hippolyta and their retinue -- come down from Greek myth. Medieval folklore provides the fairies -- Oberon, Puck, Titania and her attendants. The "rude mechanicals" are country actors. And the four lovers are just that; they have no set period, and, in fact, could be found as easily in a contemporary high school as in this play. Yet Shakespeare melds these disparate elements into a masterpiece that's theme is love.

Considered a director's play, "Dream" is certainly so in the hands of Barnes, who has burnished it to a new sheen which dazzles even the jaded eyes of theatergoers who look on it as the overdone equivalent of an opera buff's "Carmen."

From the opening mime of Hippolyta's capture, a richness of invention is evident. Barnes' pervasive use of sound effect and musical accompaniment is cinematic, as are the prominent but subtle lighting effects. While his concept is tinged at infrequent moments by some of the misguided Freudian interpretations of the play's modern directors, it is too negligibly so to disturb the cosmic innocence of this sublime comedy.

Blessed with a uniformly sound cast, the play offers some refreshingly different interpretations. One of these, Christina Traister's Hippolyta, evolves from a fiery, semi-savage warrior queen to a melting lover. Regan Thompson's Helena is a superb piece of comic acting. John Preston's Oberon -- arch, ironic, amused at everyone's foibles but his own -- is a captivating and unusual performance. Roger Forbes' Bottom the Weaver -- perhaps the living core of this play -- is, simply put, masterly.

Above Charles Caldwell's set, essentially a gigantic detail of a Fragonard painting, hangs a moon, ancient image of love's mutability. Almost imperceptibly it moves through all its phases, providing a mute commentary on the play's absurd action to parallel Bottom's acute observation that "reason and love keep little company together nowadays."

WANT TO GO?

What: William Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream"

When: Regular repertory is 7:30 p.m. Tuesday-Thurs day, 8 p.m. Friday, 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday, 2 p.m. March 11, 7:30 p.m. March 15, 8 p.m. March 16, 2 and 8 p.m. March 17, 2 p.m. March 18, 7:30 p.m. April 12, 8 p.m. April 13, 2

and 8 p.m. April 14, 7:30 p.m. April 17-18, 8 p.m. April 27, 8 p.m. May 4-5, 8 p.m. May 11-12, 2 p.m. May 13, 7:30 p.m. June 7, 8 p.m. June 15, 2 p.m. June 17, 7:30 p.m. June 21, 8 p.m. June 23, 2 p.m. June 29, 8 p.m. June 30,

7:30 p.m. July 5, 8 p.m. July 6, 7:30 p.m. July 11, 2 p.m. July 13, 2 p.m. July 15

Where: Alabama Shakespeare Festival in the Blount Cultural Park

Cost: Tickets range from \$20-\$30, depending on date and time; discounts are available

Information: 271-5353

Allan Swafford has reviewed local theater for more than 15 years. You can contact him by writing Allan Swafford, c/o the Montgomery Advertiser, 200 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36104.

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#### Abstract (Document Summary)

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