

BEHOLD THIS 'Dream'

Montgomery Advertiser - Montgomery, Ala.

Subjects: Artistic directors; Theater

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Date: Feb 25, 2001

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ASF stages Shakespeare's beloved romantic comedy

The Alabama Shakespeare Festival opens its 30th anniversary repertory season with one of the Bard's most beloved works.

"There are eight or nine very popular Shakespeare plays, and 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' is certainly one," ASF artistic director Kent Thompson said.

Guest director Paul Barnes agreed and said the romantic comedy is at the top of that list.

ASF last staged this magical play the spring of 1993, and Thompson decided it was time to bring it back because people continue to be drawn to it.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" previews at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, and it opens at 8 p.m. Friday and runs in repertory through July 15.

The show comes complete with power struggles, romance and plenty of confusion thanks to magic spells.

"It is the perfectly constructed romantic comedy. You have the lovers, the mechanicals (townspeople) and the fairies. You have dark and light," he said. "Every time you see it, you see something new in the jewel."

Barnes, a free-lance director who lives in Ashland, Ore., discovers something new each time he stages "Midsummer," which offers such rich text.

This production is set in Athens and a nearby wood during the early 19th century, a time that has a Jane Austen look, a romantic look, Barnes said.

One of the interesting things about the play is the way it breaks down into three smaller worlds -- the carpenter, weaver and other mechanicals; Lysander, Hermia and the other lovers; and Oberon, Titania and the other fairies.

"The trick is to clearly define these worlds and how they fit in as a whole," Barnes said.

Another trick to this production was working with the almost 30 actors required. This could have made the director's job more difficult.

However, each of the actors has cooperated. Each came to the first rehearsal with a sense of ensemble, he said.

"It is a real blessing to have so many people who worked together in the company," he said.

These familiar faces include John Preston, who portrays

Oberon, the king of the fairies, as well as Kathleen McCall, who portrays Titania, the queen of the fairies.

McCall said Barnes has done a great job creating the fairy world.

"It is imaginative, spritely -- and surprising, I hope," she said.

Master of Fine Arts student Robert Barry Fleming portrays one of the lovers.

"I am Lysander, who loves Hermia," said Fleming, a second-year graduate student. But Lysander changes his mind after Puck, a mischievous fairy child, casts a spell on the lovers.

"Under Puck's power, I fall for Helena and begin hating Hermia," Fleming said. "It's all very confusing, but that is part of the fun."

Fleming is pleased ASF offers its MFA student actors the opportunity to perform with the professionals.

"They tell us we are members of the acting company. Our only challenge is that we have classes in the morning in addition to productions," he said. "But we are treated as equals."

Barnes said it is important to note the way ASF offers its student actors so many opportunities to work side by side with the professionals.

"It is rare you find as careful a blend between a theater's regular actors and its training wing," Barnes said.

'DREAM' CAST

The Alabama Shakespeare Festival's production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" includes the following actors:

The Court: Mark Damon Espinoza, Theseus of Athens;

Christina Traister, Hippolyta of the Amazons; Ray Chambers, Egeus, Hermia's father; Tarah Flanagan, Hermia; Robert Barry Fleming, Lysander; Aaron Harpold, Demetrius; Regan Thompson, Helena; Rick Hamilton, Philostrate; Amy Louise Sebelius, Attendant; Chris Ensweiler, John Gardiner, Devin Haqq, Joseph Klinebriel, David Lee Nelson and Mike Strickland, Attendants

The Town: Sam Gregory, Peter Quince, a carpenter; Roger

Forbes, Nick Bottom, a weaver; Richard Thomsen, Robin

Starveling, a tailor; Chris Ensweiler, Francis Flute; Thomas Ward, Tom Snout, a tinker; J.P. Scheidler, Snug, a joiner

The Forest: Mendy Garcia, a fairy in service to Titania; Chris Mixon, Robin Goodfellow, 'Puck'; John Preston, Oberon, king of the fairies; Kathleen McCall, Titania, queen of the

fairies; Ashton Moody, Patrick Voreis and Joseph Harmon,

alternating as the Changeling Boy

Fairies in Service to Titania: David Lee Nelson, Peaseblossom; Joseph Klinebriel, Cobweb; Mike

Strickland, Moth; John Gardiner, Mustardseed

WANT TO GO?

What: William Shakespeare's 'A

Midsummer Night's Dream"

When: Previews are at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday; opens

8 p.m. Friday; regular repertory run is 2 and 8 p.m.

Saturday, 2 p.m. March 4, 7:30 p.m. March 6-7, 8 p.m.

March 9, 2 and 8 p.m. March 10, 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

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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